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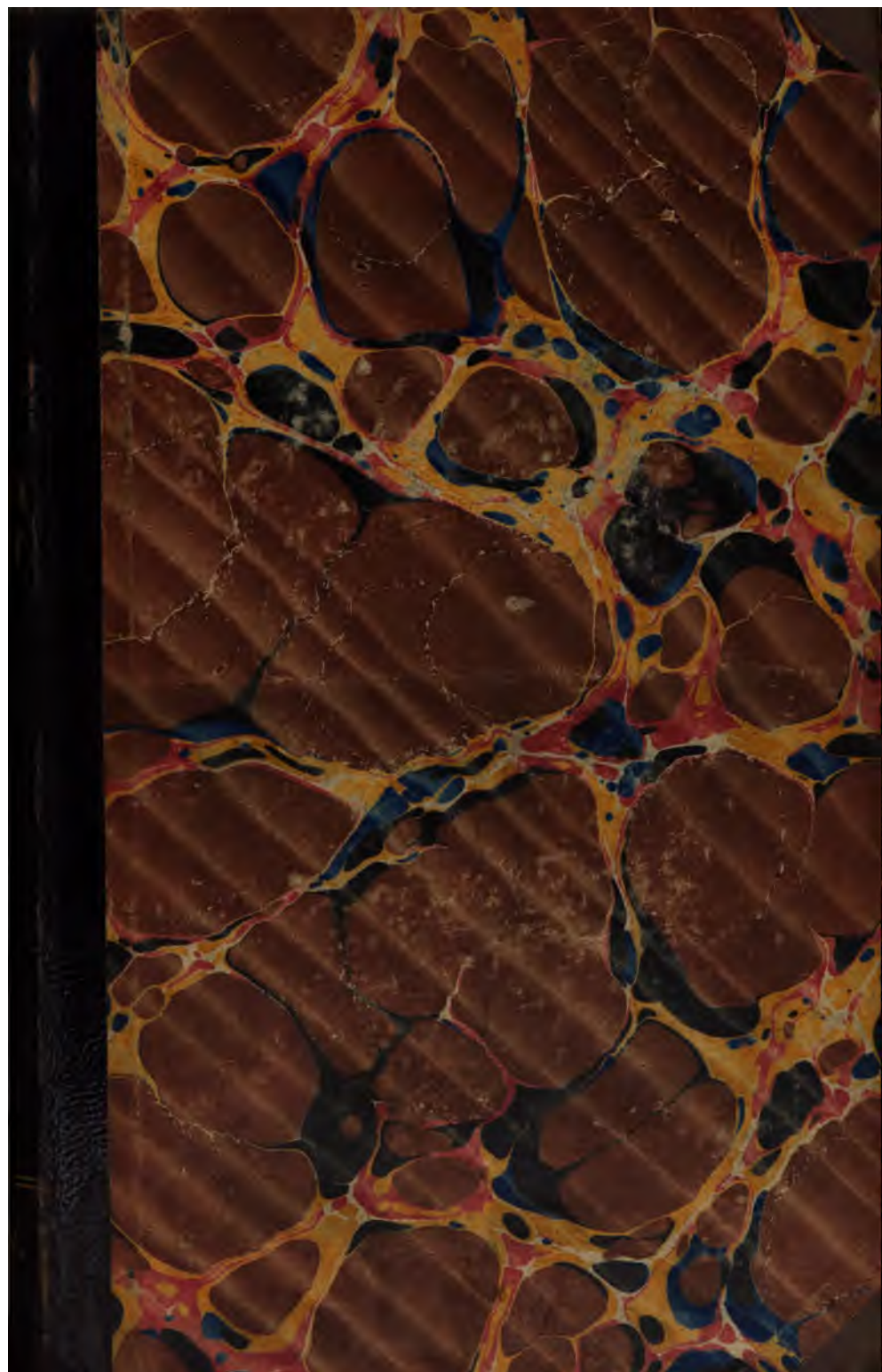
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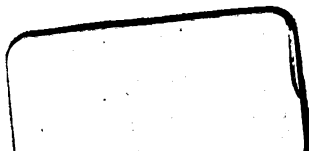
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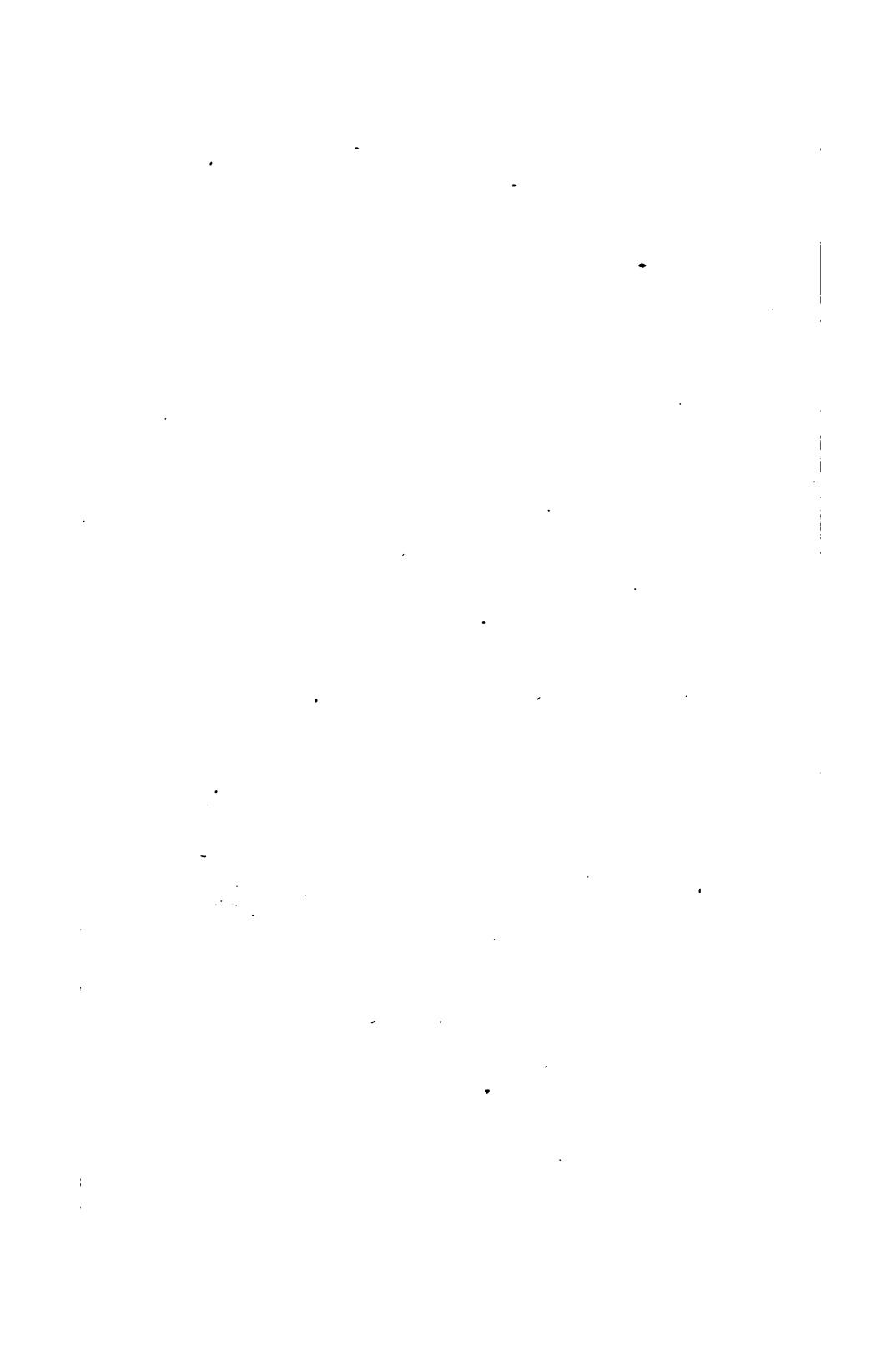
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SIR FREDERICK DERWENT.



# SIR FREDERICK DERWENT.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "FABIAN'S TOWER," AND "SMUGGLERS  
AND FORESTERS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



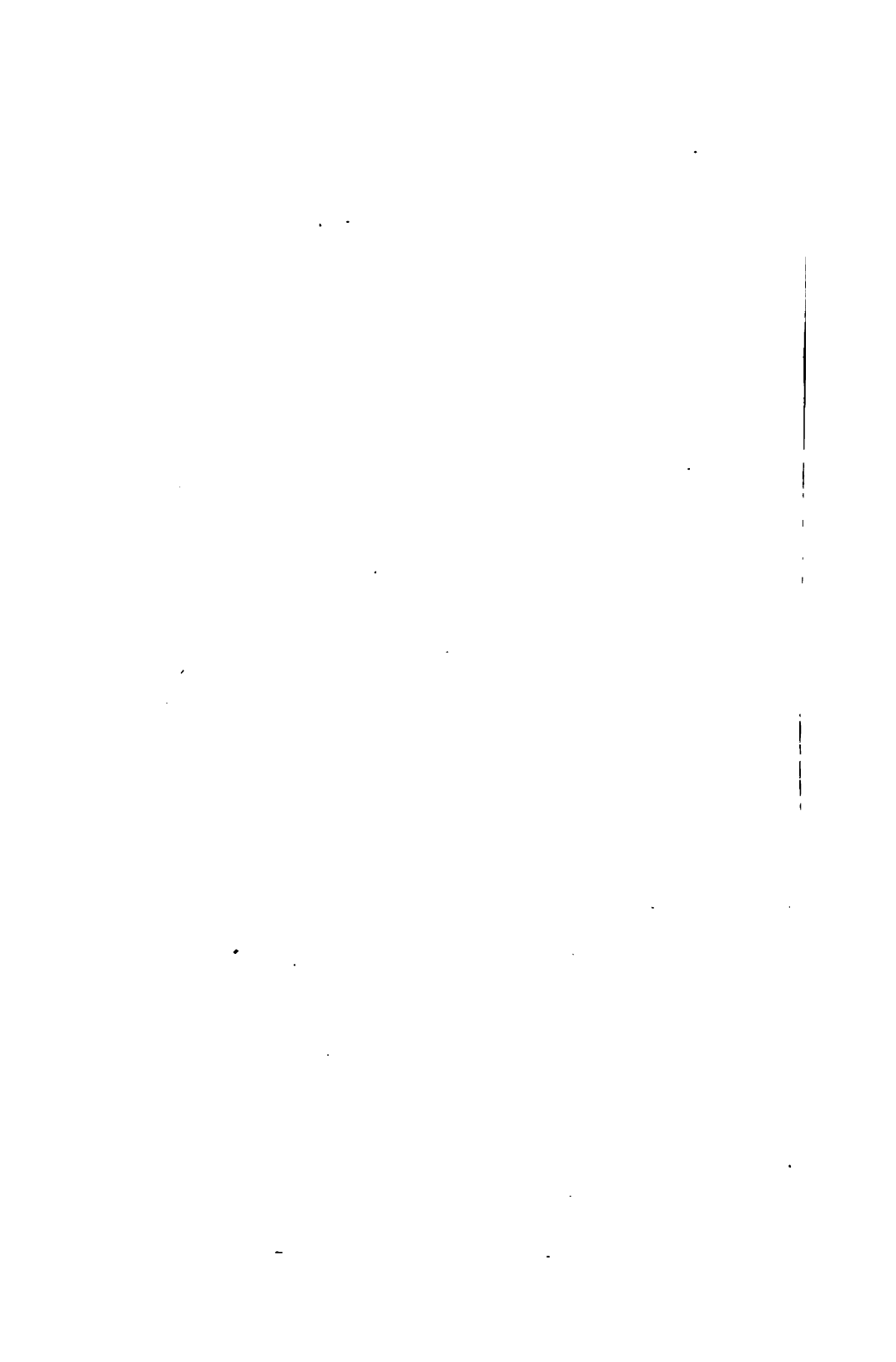
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1853.





## SIR FREDERICK DERWENT.

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### CHAPTER I.

A cold north-east wind was rushing through the straggling street of Maydwell. It was fortunate that most of the cottages had been recently thatched, and the broken windows mended; for the winter had been unusually severe, and, although the primroses were out in the lanes, spring deferred its coming. The evergreens in front of the Parsonage, the ivy on the walls in the village, were blighted and frost-bitten. The intense cold of the clear but still wintry nights, was hardly greater than that which the searching wind brought with it by day.

It was said to be a wise and merciful dispensation of Providence, which had let loose the icy breath of the freezing blast upon those usually

smiling and sheltered southern valleys. The oldest inhabitant could not remember such a winter ; but those who recognised the hand of the Almighty in His dealings with His creatures,—and the number of persons thus disposed was greater than it had been the year before,—remarked with thankfulness, that, from the time when the frost set in, there had been no new cases of cholera.

The appearance of the place was, in many respects, altered. The gardens were neater, and the foul ditch, which even Roger Pemberton had stigmatised, now cleared from weeds and every kind of impurity, formed the channel for a transparent stream of running water. A well covered in, and with a little paved court around and stone benches beside it, bore the inscription on its arched portal, of the date of the past year as that of its construction.

An entirely new row of cottages was being built, on the site of a collection of small tenements, where the disease had raged most fearfully.

Those now in the course of erection were on an improved plan, and it was intended that they should be let only to persons who would further their landlord's wish to encourage order and respectability among his tenantry. Other beneficial measures were said to be in contemplation; but circumstances had lately interfered with their being carried into effect, as rapidly as was at first designed.

It was not a favourable day for judging of these improvements. The unfinished model-cottages certainly looked cold and bleak. The little plots meant for flowers in front, the vegetable gardens at the back, were fenced in but not planted. The potatoes in the newly marked-out allotment grounds, for the benefit of the labourers, had as yet made no attempt at growing. There was no fresh grass in the fields, and, on the downs, the turf was cracked and brown. Had the village been in its past state of untidiness, the wind would have blown away every unsavoury odour; as it was now carrying before

it the dust and small stones of the causeway, and the broken branches of the leafless trees.

On such an ungenial day, it was not to be wondered at, if Mr. Holcombe hardly did justice to his friend's exertions, as, for the first time since his return from Italy, he walked through the village with Sir Frederick Derwent. Arm in arm, as in days of yore, they went along together ; but a great change had taken place in one, if not in both of the two men who now gazed, with different impressions, on the simple scene before them.

As far as appearances went, the alteration which had occurred was in Mr. Holcombe's favour. The Rector of Maydwell looked greatly the better for his travels. Sir Frederick, on the contrary, was paler and thinner than during the preceding summer. A glance at his once portly frame was enough to show that he had suffered heavily in the affliction which had visited his people. The cholera, in its ravages, had spared neither the peasantry nor their master. His

manner was much graver than formerly ; and, as he walked up the street, the cottagers came to their doors, and expressed unfeigned pleasure at seeing him once more among them.

Their slow progress somewhat irritated his companion. The east wind, though he looked in such perfect health, seemed to annoy him more than it did Sir Frederick. He glanced carelessly round upon what was new to him, where his friend would willingly have lingered to point out details ; and impatiently cut short the affectionate and respectful inquiries of the villagers, by declaring that it was perfect madness for an invalid to stand talking in the street, in the teeth of the icy breeze.

There was no denying the truth of this assertion. The fire shone temptingly through the low windows of the Parsonage ; and Sir Frederick, with his usual goodnature, wished to bid Mrs. Holcombe welcome to England. He thought that she appeared older and less cheerful than when he last saw her ; and her address was not

quite so cordial ; but he set down the change in her manner to embarrassment, arising from knowing that his correspondence with the Rector had been of an unpleasant nature. He was surprised that Holcombe did not seem to experience the slightest awkwardness at meeting him ; and gave his wife credit for greater delicacy of feeling.

Mr. Holcombe had met with a cold reception in his parish, literally as well as metaphorically. The skies did not frown upon him more gloomily than the people whom he had forsaken in their trial hour. Scarcely a word had been spoken to him, as he walked past the line of cottages ; and the church, where he preached the preceding Sunday, was almost deserted. Sir Frederick could not help feeling hurt at the slighting tone in which he alluded to the improvements in the village ; complimenting the baronet somewhat ironically, on his Herculean labours, and regretting that he had been himself so great a sufferer.

“ You should have taken flight in time, Der-

went. It is madness to expose one's health unnecessarily ; and you might have given *carte blanche* to Lambert and Dixon, to do all your generous soul dictated. If you ask my opinion and Mrs. Holcombe's, depend upon it, we shall give it against you. The place is by no means worth your throwing away ten years of your life to benefit a set of ungrateful rascals, who, before next summer, will have forgotten their obligation, cut up their rustic fences for fuel, and found some way, I will lay my life, of evading your stringent and, no doubt, excellent regulations ; which, I must confess, did not gain the attention they deserved, when you were dilating upon them in the very face of the easterly wind !”

“ My tenants have had, like myself, a severe lesson ;” said Sir Frederick, rather coldly. “ I assure you, I do not wish to have been spared the trial. It has brought us all nearer together ; and you would have felt more interest in what I have been showing you, if you had thought proper to take your chance with us, and not left us to meet our troubles alone.”



“My dear fellow! how can you expect a man who has been living in the finest climate in Europe, with his windows open half through December, and the Crater of Vesuvius close at hand, belching out flame against a sapphire sky, to feel much interest in anything on such a day and in such a climate as this?” replied the Rector, affectedly. “We have had the most delightful tour!—You must travel, Derwent, to get rid of the effects of this terrible illness. I make a capital cicerone; and this specimen of an English spring is enough to induce me to accept the first eligible offer that may enable a poor parson like me to shake off his home troubles. After all, you did not find much difficulty in getting the duty done for me. I confess, I was surprised at your being on such good terms with young Pemberton; but if he would take it, the rest was of no sort of consequence. We were not bound to study his feelings; and some men are not so chary of their dignity as others. I was afraid that he might object to filling my place; but the old

clerk tells me, 'Master Lewis' seemed quite at home in my pulpit, and was a prodigious favourite with my sanctified congregation."

A slight flush mounted to the Rector's brow, as he spoke, showing that his indifference was feigned. Sir Frederick warmly expressed his obligations to Lewis; and declared that but for his aid, the duty, for several Sundays, would not have been performed:

"Our ancient enmity,—if, indeed, it ever extended to the younger Pemberton,—is quite at an end; and I am heartily glad of it:" he added. "Lewis Pemberton acted like a brother towards me, during my trying illness. I look upon him and Bingley as among my sincerest friends."

"You don't say so!—Well, I think you are right. The sooner these ridiculous quarrels, which people in the country nurse up and brood over till they appear of consequence, are set straight, the better. I dare say, you and Roger will shake hands across Fordington brook ere

long:" answered the Rector, with a somewhat constrained laugh. "Mr. Lewis Pemberton is man of the world enough,—despite his eccentric political and religious opinions, which made me rather regret that you had lent him my pulpit,—to know that it is better to be on good terms with you than sparring at every trifle. I do not like him, certainly; and I fancy, he has done harm and unsettled people's minds; but, now that I have got back to my work, I must try to reduce things to order."

"It is time you should:" said Sir Frederick. "I do not imagine that much harm has been done; but, if it is so, you must blame yourself for deserting your post. You will certainly have to work hard to persuade us not to feel grateful to a man who has never shrunk from standing at our bedsides, in the most fearful time of peril."

"Derwent, you are dreadfully hipped! I see that plainly. You ought to go somewhere for a change, till we can get the cricket-ground open; and something stirring to amuse you. This is a

dismal month ;—and, in England, if the weather is gloomy, people pay the season the compliment of shutting themselves up to enjoy it. I declare, I have thought of nothing else since I came home. Abroad, one has a thousand resources. By-the-bye, I have a friend staying with me, to whom I must introduce you :—an excellent fellow ; one of Jellachich's most distinguished compatriots. He has ridden over to Stanmore Park, this morning. I dare say he took his pistols to defend himself against wolves ; for he has constant battles with them on his wild domains, and could scarcely believe, as we drove over the downs, from the station, on Saturday, that these cold regions did not harbour them. We must get up something to amuse him, while he stays here ; for, really, these villages are terribly dull for men accustomed to perpetual excitement, and the continual chances of the game of life, played out with spirit, whether in camps or courts, on the continent ! ”

Mr. Holcombe was, perhaps, sensible of some

coldness on the part of Sir Frederick, for he observed to his wife when he returned from walking home with him, that he looked upon Derwent as completely ruined. Never was there a man so altered for the worse, or more entirely lost to his friends and to society. Mrs. Holcombe was disposed to take a more encouraging view of their neighbour's case. Sir Frederick looked ill, and not in his usual good spirits; but one circumstance might, naturally enough, be the consequence of the other. A man of his florid and sanguine temperament was peculiarly apt to suffer from confinement, and to grow despondent during illness. She privately resolved to invite Penelope, and to give that deserving young female a last chance, now that her womanly instinct led her to suspect Sir Frederick to be in more need of soothing attentions, than of the amusements which Mr. Holcombe had suggested, as desirable to promote his recovery.

Half way between the Hall and the Parsonage, the Baronet and the Clergyman had encountered

Mr. Holcombe's friend, riding leisurely homewards, and looking with apparent interest around him. The proposed introduction took place; and the stranger conversed for some moments with them. It puzzled Mr. Holcombe considerably, why his visitor and Sir Frederick, as though instinctively, should take an immediate dislike to each other; but he felt as certain of this being the case, as if "*Il Burbero Benefico*" had blurted out, in the most uncourteous terms, the disagreeable impression made upon him by the foreigner; or Jellachich's compatriot had ordered his Croatian soldiery to cut him to pieces, without benefit of clergy.

Sir Frederick Derwent was, nevertheless, even when, as now, showing the traces of recent illness, a very favourable specimen of an English country gentleman; and the foreign nobleman was a tall, distinguished-looking person, with delicately-cut features, a fair complexion, only slightly shaded by light brown, small moustaches and beard in admirable order. There was

nothing of the barbarian in his appearance, which was that of a man of the world and a gentleman; yet Sir Frederick unhesitatingly declared to the ladies of his family that the Holcombes had an adventurer staying with them, whom he should not, if he could evade the necessity, invite to his house. He did not mention that this unknown individual was, according to the Rector, a hero of the first water; nor that even the few words exchanged between them, in the village, had given Sir Frederick time to observe that, while he chose to dislike the expression of his countenance, it was undeniably strikingly handsome.

The rest of their walk, until they separated at the door leading into the shrubbery, was occupied by the Rector in detailing the military achievements of his friend; to which Sir Frederick listened in silence. Amidst the recital of the exploits which had won for the imperial officer the highest honours and orders in the power of his sovereign to bestow, there occurred the names

of places where deeds of cruelty, disgraceful to a soldier's name, had been committed. The revolutionary war in Hungary had been sullied by atrocities which made the fame of the conquerors of a once free and noble nation, at best, but of doubtful value. Sir Frederick, at all events, was not sufficiently well satisfied with the cosmopolite ideas collected by Mr. Holcombe in his travels, to be disposed to extend to his present visitor the hospitality with which the Rectory guests were usually received at Maydwell.



## CHAPTER II.

THE old house and gardens of Maydwell Place, lying in the sheltered hollow of the downs, with the thick woods and lofty screens of evergreens around them, were, even in this severe season, sunny and verdant. The grass was soft and fresh-looking. Spring flowers filled the borders of the old-fashioned walks. If, in the summer, the place could only boast of its magnificent woods and clear stream, — now, when Mrs. Holcombe's verbena and geranium beds were empty,—snowdrops, and primroses, early violets and crocuses, made the residence of Sir Frederick Derwent, notwithstanding the neglect of his bachelor days, look gay and pleasant.

All through the winter, the mansion had been warm and comfortable. Even now, the east wind did not pierce the high laurel hedge of the

Lady's walk, nor blow across the sloping lawn. The brook ran past with a cheerful sound ; and, along its banks, the willows were putting forth their red-tinted, tassel-like blossoms, though there was not a leaf out in the woodlands beyond. Sir Frederick came into the grounds through the masked door in the wall, and looked round him with a sensation of pleasure, after parting in the village street from Mr. Holcombe, who was in haste to rejoin his friend.

It did not appear to annoy him, in the least, that the days when he went in and out unquestioned were decidedly over. Mrs. Dixon, indeed, still kept in the back ground ; but Laura and Clarice were watching for him at the window, which was opened instantly to admit him. Fair fingers assisted in taking off his great coat. The most comfortable sofa in the room was wheeled close to the brightly burning fire for his accommodation ; and remedies suggested for the cold which his pretty nurses tenderly reproached him for having run the risk of catching, by staying

away so long, on this, the first day of being trusted out of their sight, beyond the by no means disagreeable bounds of his imprisonment.

Sir Frederick submitted to his fate with a much better grace than, considering the habits of his former life, could have been expected from him. He was by no means certain that it was not worth while to have been ill, in order to bring out the treasure of affection which his shy niece no longer hesitated to bestow upon him. All the love which Laura had lavished on the memory of her parents, was now transferred to their representative. Her respect and tenderness for her uncle, since, in various ways, illness had improved his character, were unbounded; and, in her devotion to him, Clarice had taken a full share.

The two girls were dressed alike, now that Laura had at length laid aside her mourning. It seemed their wish to appear as sisters; and, perhaps, they in reality entertained the same dutiful regard for their kind host. On this point,

Sir Frederick had not quite made up his mind. Hitherto, his very dangerous illness had prevented his being able to investigate closely his own or other people's sentiments; beyond knowing that he liked to see the two fair and gentle women constantly near him. At present, his mind, sobered and chastened by suffering, was full of the grateful and agreeable sensations inspired by returning health. Not a single unpleasant suspicion had lately obtruded itself upon him.

He was not allowed to move away from the fire. The two girls took pleasure in waiting upon him. After dinner, Clarice sang him to sleep for an hour. At least, he lay quite still, with his eyes closed, and the fire-light struggling with the encreasing darkness. When, at length, she came quietly to her usual position near him, to make the tea, the look of fatigue which had alarmed them upon his coming home, had left his countenance. He was no longer chilled by his imprudent expedition to the village, which Laura had declared was certain to bring on a relapse.

She had felt quite uneasy, Miss Derwent said, ever since Mr. Holcombe's unexpected return to the Parsonage, on Saturday. He was sure to lead her uncle, through his carelessness, to incur some perhaps fatal hazard. Clarice and herself had been miserable, all the afternoon, fancying them standing in the bitter wind, contemplating the improvements; and forgetting the terrible illness from which Sir Frederick had just recovered.

"I assure you, Holcombe seemed to feel the wind more than I did,"—her uncle rejoined:—"and did not evince the slightest wish to induce me to commit any imprudence in exposing myself to it. I believe, I was more anxious to show him the new cottages, than he was to look at them. He has come home with his head full of pictures and statues, operas and foreign politics; and, I suspect, thinks a trumpery village like Maydwell beneath his consideration."

Sir Frederick's auditors were now as much inclined to be affronted by Mr. Holcombe's paying too little attention to the improvement of the

place, as they had previously been by his fancied want of care for the invalid. He was more out of favour than ever. They were prepared to dislike his foreign guest, as much as the Baronet could possibly desire. Clarice, in particular, seemed to entertain a very unflattering opinion of the whole race of men frequenting the dissipated capital of Southern Italy, where the Rector had been idling away his time. Almost all her associations with the country where her mother chose to reside, appeared to be disagreeable ones; and she fully coincided with Laura in thinking Sir Frederick still too much indisposed to be able to invite any company to the house.

He felt almost sorry that he was, in reality, so much better as not to deserve such anxious care. At any other period of his life he would assuredly not have hesitated about shaking off his remaining sensations of weakness, and asking the Holcombes and their friend to dinner. Now, he was glad of an excuse to defer making the exertion, and dismissed the idea of resuming his wonted hospitable habits, at all events, for the present.

The return of the Rector to the Parsonage, instead of enlarging the domestic circle at Maydwell, as had been the case in past times, threatened to contract it. Sir Frederick, more than once during the evening, expressed his apprehension that they would not see half so much of Lewis Pemberton, now that his labours in the parish were at an end. It was very natural that none of the small party left lately so much dependent on each other's society, should regard the young clergyman's presence as any cause of interruption or restraint. During the most alarming period of Sir Frederick's illness, when all the habits of the family were disarranged, he had been constantly with them. An intimacy which is nowhere so quickly and closely cemented, as among those who are together in times of sickness and anxiety, had sprung up; and, though Lewis came less frequently when the immediate cause of distress was removed, he was always a welcome guest.

To the long conversations which Sir Frederick and Lewis Pemberton had held together, during

her uncle's tedious convalescence, Laura attributed the very great and material change apparent in his habits and disposition. Whether the impression which had been effected would be a lasting one, or vanish with restored health and the return of Mr. Holcombe, time alone must decide. At present, not merely both his pretty mistresses, but Sir Frederick himself, were perfectly aware that the clerical duty of Maydwell parish had been in far better hands, during its Pastor's absence, than it was likely to be in future.

It was not only by those direct exertions in his behalf, which had inspired the hitherto indolent lover of ease with a fresh sense of duty, and of the value of existence to himself and others, that Lewis Pemberton had won the confidence and regard of Sir Frederick Derwent; he respected and liked him for the general uprightness of his conduct, and the cultivation of mind which rendered him as agreeable a companion as the Baronet, in his present mood, could desire to



associate with. The harmony of that quiet household had been very great ; and Sir Frederick found a sufficient occupation in his designs for the improvement of the village, to supersede the wish for other objects of interest and excitement than were afforded him in his own home. Better music could not be enjoyed, he was in the habit of saying, in London or Vienna, than he could hear, every evening, without stirring from his sofa ; and the languor of weakened health, perhaps, made these soft sounds the most beguiling which had ever lingered in his ears.

Sir Frederick was not in the least selfish ; yet he did not feel, at this time, the slightest inclination to admit others to participate in the exquisite gratification he received, from that exercise of her musical powers by which Clarice was always ready to charm away his often imaginary ailments and fatigue. He had not appreciated her singing half so much, at the parties in the summer, as when, soothed and commiserated by both his fair companions, he reclined lazily by

the fireside, half wishing that this pleasant state of indisposition might last for ever.

In this jealously-exclusive mood, it did not at all displease him to discover that Lewis Pemberton was not so passionate an admirer of Clarice's singing as himself. The young clergyman probably preferred a severer and simpler school ; for he lingered longer to listen to Laura, when, on Sabbath evenings, she played old chants, or sang some plaintive hymn in the twilight. There was no accounting for taste. Sir Frederick heartily despised that of Lewis in these particulars ; but he was by no means disposed to cavil with his indifference to the thrilling strains of Clarice's Italian melodies, since it left him the pleasure of concluding that it was himself alone for whom, actuated perhaps by a naturally kind disposition, Miss Le Sage consented, evening after evening, to take so much trouble.

He missed Lewis Pemberton greatly, on the present occasion, not only on account of liking and valuing his society, but because, when he

was present, courtesy as well as inclination induced Laura to bestow attention upon their guest. While they were conversing on grave or intellectual subjects, Sir Frederick would go over to the other end of the room, where the pianoforte was placed, and persuade Clarice to sing to him portions of favourite operas, or discuss with him their merits. There was nothing inharmonious or discourteous in the low murmur of voices, never loud enough to disturb the music, but which, on the contrary, made a pleasant accompaniment to those fragments of sweet song.

Sir Frederick was not too much tired, this evening, when the tea-tray was removed, to petition for another air; nor even to follow Clarice to the piano, when, as it had been the custom for every one in the house to do, since his illness, she complied with his demands. Had they been much more unreasonable, she and Laura had lately got into the way of humouring the invalid.

He was, nevertheless, as ignorant of her real feelings as he had been, the preceding summer,

and could almost have wished her to be less uniformly kind and friendly, in order that some chance word or look might reveal them to him. By this time, he was not in the least doubt respecting his own. Whatever might be Clarice's position in the world, there existed no circumstance strong enough to prevent his earnestly desiring to make her his wife. All that restrained the declaration of his sentiments, was his fear that, if she did not return his affection, their present delightful intercourse would be at an end. He could not bear the idea of her leaving Maydwell ; and he hesitated to ask her to remain there as his wife, in the dread lest a refusal should separate them for ever.

It was this predominant train of thought which made the return of Mr. Holcombe, before matters were decided, very unwelcome to Sir Frederick. The sight of his old friend brought back ideas with which he did not wish to be tormented, at that moment. All he wanted to know was, whether Clarice had waited upon and nursed him

so bewitchingly, without one tenderer sentiment than she might have bestowed upon her grandfather? He scarcely believed this to be possible. That long winter had made them necessary to each other; and, if she thought as he did, the Rector had better not express what he well knew would be his opinion of the imprudence of the match; since nothing on earth would prevent its taking place.

An unpleasant sensation had assailed him, when Holcombe's cynical glance rested on his features. He wished that he had not talked of his having lost ten years of life, under the stern pressure of sickness. Alas, he could ill spare a day! was his reflection, as he looked down upon the fair brow, unmarked by a single line, the raven tresses and bright complexion of the young songstress. Like all men deeply in love, Sir Frederick had become very distrustful of his own powers of pleasing. He was glad that, on his own side, there were some advantages of position, to set against so much youthful grace and beauty.

## CHAPTER III.

MR. HOLCOMBE had always been in the habit of depending upon his sociable neighbour at the Hall, for the amusement of any chance guests who might be staying with him at the Parsonage. The pretty low-roofed cottage afforded very few resources. The miniature hall was not spacious enough to contain a billiard-table :—a moderate-sized bagatelle-board would have made it look crowded. The stables were just large enough for his own saddle-horses, and the pair his wife drove in her carriage: There was not even a dog upon the premises ; and the children, not being remarkably pretty, did not attract much of the Baron's attention.

After breakfast, during which Mrs. Holcombe declared that she always missed the Baronet's tap at the window, the Rector and his friend strolled into the village. It seemed a natural

thing, in the course of the morning, to take him to Maydwell. There was in fact nothing else worth seeing, and Sir Frederick's recent illness made Mr. Holcombe anxious to enquire after him. He did not however avail himself of his former privileges, but entered the grounds by the Lodge-gates, and took his visitor with due ceremony up to the front door of the old house, where he enquired for Sir Frederick.

The two gentlemen were shown into the drawing-room, whence the ladies had retreated. Sir Frederick joined them immediately. It was not in his nature to receive his old friend otherwise than with cordiality. Mr. Holcombe was more in the humour, apparently, to feel interested in local topics than he had seemed upon the previous day. After a time, the foreigner asked permission to leave them together, and inspect the beautiful domain which he had been admiring from the windows. Its perfectly English aspect gave the woodland scenery a peculiar charm in his estimation.

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The Rector drew his chair nearer to Sir Frederick's, when the trouble of entertaining his visitor was taken off his hands, and they had seen the Baron, after stopping two or three times, as if to observe the situation of the house and the beauty of the evergreens, take his way towards the bridge over the brook, and his tall figure disappear among the plantations. He had come over to England with them, Mr. Holcombe said, on private business, which would bring him, they found, into that neighbourhood; and, after being in the same society abroad, it was impossible not to invite him to spend a few days at the Parsonage; but he feared that Yermaloff found it terribly dull. There was very little to amuse him in such a place as Maydwell.

Abroad, it was quite different—if a man chose to go into the provinces, it was on some sporting expedition, or with a gay party of friends, in the middle of summer. No foreigner would consider it possible to endure the life of a country gentleman of moderate income, or the Rector of



a remote, rural parish in England. There were individuals set apart to dedicate their lives to such purposes as visiting the poor, and imparting religious instruction to all classes, who understood from earliest youth that they were debarred from the enjoyments of society.—They had their own objects of ambition. Mr. Holcombe did not say their system was the best, but it worked, all things considered, well, and had a vast deal that was imposing about it.

Sir Frederick was silent. He had, during the Rector's absence, learned more than he had ever known before of a system which, if not perfect, is, when conscientiously carried out, as nearly so as human ability can frame. Lewis Pemberton's active and earnest disposition—Bingley's serene self-denying cheerfulness,—their unspotted character and career of arduous duty, rose up before his mind's eye, rebuking the careless contemner of a life to which, conforming himself indifferently, even as regarded the letter, Mr. Holcombe was, in the spirit, entirely adverse.

"A Benedictine monk, or a village curé has, at all events, the advantage of his career being plainly marked out before him:" pursued Mr. Holcombe. "I wish, with all my heart, that another profession had been chosen for me; but, as it is, I must make the best of it, and there are worse fellows than myself belonging to the ministry. What I detest more than anything else, is cant. The objection to lending one's pulpit is, that, if the man who takes it has not gentlemanly feelings, he is sure to make a party against the regular clergyman in his parish. That is what Mr. Pemberton has been doing. The first thing I was told when I came home, was that his brother confidently affirms that I am about to vacate the living for his benefit, and that you are going to bestow it, with Miss Derwent's hand, upon him."

Sir Frederick looked excessively annoyed.

"Nonsense, Holcombe!—You know I should never tolerate such an alliance. Laura, poor girl, has not a thought of it:—nor has any one,

till this moment, ever hinted, in my presence, at the possibility of young Pemberton's succeeding you in the living."

"I assure you I am considered quite an interloper: "—said Mr. Holcombe. "Every one seems to think me virtually defunct, and to have determined that my place is empty and might be better filled. Or rather, I should say, a rascally set of Methodists, whom I have never encouraged, have got the upper hand in the village, and, like all Radicals, hold any change to be desirable, because the scum would then work its way to the surface; and they know that any position must be preferable to the one which they have hitherto occupied."

"You are quite mistaken, I assure you, Holcombe.—Pemberton is a perfect gentleman, and would not, I am certain, abuse my hospitality: " said the Baronet, with much heat. "However high may be my opinion of his merits, he is well aware that there is a line of demarcation between

our families. As long as I live, no niece of mine shall marry a Pemberton."

"Don't excite yourself, Derwent!"—You are not strong enough to get into a passion, with impunity. Besides, why should you? How can you be surprised? Upon my word, old friend, you have not shown your usual discrimination in this affair, and have no one on earth to blame but yourself! Don't say I did not warn you. I saw, in the summer, exactly what would happen. I never in my life knew one of those priggish, sanctimonious, methodistical beings, who was not an arrant hypocrite. Miss Derwent is very much to be pitied, if matters have gone as far as I suspect. As for him, my opinion now is no worse than it always has been, for you have certainly done your best to throw temptation in his way. Do you really mean to say that you have not even suspected an attachment, about which all the community of Maydwell are perfectly well informed?"

"Village gossip! — abominable scandal! — I should like to know who dares to affirm that my niece is going to be married to Roger Pemberton's brother!" exclaimed Sir Frederick, now in a towering passion. "Excuse me, Holcombe, but I must hear your authority for this ridiculous story."

"You had better ask Miss Derwent and Mr. Pemberton what truth there is in the report, before you quarrel with me for repeating what has been dinned into my ears, by every soul in the place, since I came home;" said Mr. Holcombe, coolly. "You will find it difficult to convince people of your entire ignorance of the business; since, by inviting Mr. Pemberton constantly to the house, you have certainly encouraged the idea that his attentions to Miss Derwent had your full sanction, and were likely to be crowned by your blessing and the next presentation to the living."

While he spoke, Sir Frederick was rapidly pacing up and down the room, in a state of considerable excitement. Mr. Holcombe's satirical

words, as he went on, partly quizzing his friend for his blindness, partly animadverting on Lewis Pemberton and Laura, for having designedly kept him in the dark, stung his impatient auditor to the quick. Sir Frederick was by nature passionate; he was also of a trustful disposition. From the first, he had felt that he did not quite understand the more reserved character of his niece. Had it been Clarice, his confidence would not have been misplaced.

At that moment, as he passed the window, his eye suddenly caught sight of two figures standing very near each other, in the path through the plantation. In summer, or even in a more genial spring, these persons would have been quite invisible from the mansion; but, now, the leafless branches offered a less impervious screen than usual.

The intervening boughs somewhat impeded his vision, but Sir Frederick was very clear-sighted. At first, the idea that it was Laura and Lewis flashed across his mind; but the man was

taller than young Pemberton, and something in the air of the female instantly convinced him that it was not Miss Derwent, but a more agile, buoyant creature, with whom he was conversing.

Presently, the two came together almost to the margin of the stream ; another brief colloquy was held ; then the lady turned off into one of the woodland walks, with a quick elastic movement, which Sir Frederick would have recognised, miles off, as characteristic of Clarice Sage. The tall figure maintained its place by her side, until they disappeared together among the plantations. To his infinite surprise, Sir Frederick, as they stood by the bridge, decided that the companion of Clarice was Mr. Holcombe's friend, Baron Yermaloff, with whom he had, previously, every reason to believe her totally unacquainted.

His good humour was by no means restored by this circumstance, which Mr. Holcombe, as he sat with his back to the window, had no opportunity of observing. For the first time in his life, Sir Frederick permitted his ungallant friend's

derogatory remarks about women to pass uncontradicted. All he desired was to get rid of him. At last, Mr. Holcombe, having effected his purpose of making him thoroughly uncomfortable, perceived that his prolonged stay was not desirable. Yermaloff had perhaps found his way back to the village ; he had certainly taken an unconscionable time to inspect the leafless woodlands. Leaving a message with the servants, in case of his return, the Rector went home to the parsonage.

Sir Frederick began to doubt whether his increased domestic felicity was as real as he had lately fancied. His post of guardian to two beautiful girls appeared likely to be a troublesome one ; his enquiries after them were quite unsuccessful. Miss Derwent and Miss Le Sage were not in the house. None of the domestics knew at what time they had gone out, nor which direction they had chosen.

The quickest mode of ascertaining where he might find the fugitives, was to take a survey of



the domain. Armed with his telescope, Sir Frederick ascended the steep hill on which the flag-staff was mounted. From thence, at this season, not a corner of his grounds was hidden from him. He directed his glass first towards the home plantations, but no one was visible there. During the latter part of Mr. Holcombe's conversation, and the time it had occupied to gain his present elevated position, one pair of culprits had escaped his vigilance.

In quite another part of the woods, coming from the opposite direction, two persons were slowly approaching. They were not in the domain of Maydwell, and their progress was so deliberate, — they stopped so frequently, — that Sir Frederick could not for some time recognize them with certainty. These distant figures were those of a man and woman, in the lane which, on one side, was bordered by Roger Pemberton's land,—on the other, by fields belonging to Sir Frederick Derwent.

Between the high hedges where the blackthorn,

in their case truly an emblem of difficulty, was struggling into blossom, he saw the undistinguishable figures move along, lingering with perfect impartiality at every gate and stile; and looking over them, now into burly Roger's land, now into his own domain.

At the turn in the lane, where the brook shut in the widow's cottage, they made a long pause. Perhaps there might be a few primroses blooming under the shelter of the bank, which, unconscious of observation, the lovers, for such they appeared to be, were stopping, like thoughtless children, to gather.

A sterner look came into Sir Frederick's face, as he watched to see whether this couple would enter the grounds of Maydwell. By the time they had crossed the meadow, no doubt existed in his mind that it was Lewis Pemberton and Laura Derwent whom he was observing. When they reached the shelter of the plantations, Lewis, without the slightest hesitation, opened the gate for his companion, and, after they had passed through, drew her arm within his own.

Sir Frederick could not see them so plainly, now, as when they were in the open field; but, by the time they took to pass the different openings in the trees, he knew that they must be walking very slowly, and pausing often. The path they were pursuing led direct to the Lady's Well. Could it be Laura's intention to take young Lewis thither?

The traditions which hung about the place had always exercised great influence over Sir Frederick's mind. His impression was strong that the nymph of the spring had a decided objection to the Pembertons. He wondered whether Lewis would presume to dip the glass in the water, and pledge his fair companion. This was a common custom, and it was believed that wishes formed while the air-bubbles remained on the top of the sparkling element, would come to pass. Every pair of rustic lovers in Maydwell kept tryst at the Lady's Well. Sir Frederick, with his usual good nature, had left a path open to it from the village.

Probably, this circumstance, added to Mr.

Holcombe's insinuations, made him particularly angry at Lewis Pemberton and Laura Derwent's visiting the place together. Putting the spy-glass in his pocket, Sir Frederick descended the hill, and took the path leading through the woods to the rustic summer house.

Even now, as he walked along, he cast searching glances to the right and left, and his mind was considerably distracted by the expectation of encountering Clarice and the tall Sclavonian. Nothing, however, was to be seen of them, and Sir Frederick in vain strove to conjecture the meaning of the close, and apparently intimate, conversation wherein he had seen them engaged. Was she, as well as Laura, taking advantage of his incompetency as a guardian, and carrying on some mysterious correspondence with this adventurous, foreign friend of the Rector?

As he thought of Clarice, his ideas went back to the pleasant period of his convalescence; but everything assumed a different colouring. Her readiness to oblige no longer gratified him. The

expression she threw into her songs, now plaintive, the next moment buoyant with happiness or replete with passion, was perhaps prompted by some concealed attachment. While he was sitting beside her, or turning over the page, her thoughts might be devoted, those ardent words addressed in fancy, to the handsome, dissipated-looking barbarian.

His respect for Lewis Pemberton's character, as he had seen it displayed in the trying season of the pestilence, and the obligations under which he conceived both himself and his people to be to the man who had first awakened him to the true sense of his responsibilities towards them, only served, at this moment of irritation, to increase his anger. The surmises thrown out by the Rector had deeply mortified him. Had he indeed been as blind and inconsiderate as Holcombe suggested, or had his niece and young Pemberton purposely deceived him? He could not remember that anything in their manner bore out his friend's accusation; but he was forced to

confess that his own thoughts had been too busily occupied to allow him to observe them attentively.

Though Sir Frederick walked much more quickly than the sentimental couple he had watched so narrowly, during their progress through the lane and the woods, the lovers, if such they were, had full time to make their escape, before he reached the summer-house. The shrine of the water-nymph was empty. The goblet, carefully replaced in its niche, could tell no tale as to whether irreverent hands had profaned it. The wood-pigeons were cooing as they wooed their mates, but no other love-notes disturbed the solitude.

Sir Frederick felt as angry as men generally do, when, having worked themselves into a thorough passion, they find no object on which to vent their ill-humour. He was tired and heated by his quick walk; and, while he was gazing about him with a dissatisfied air, wondering whether his senses had deceived him, and

whether it were indeed Laura and Clarice who had excited his jealous apprehensions, the sound of the dinner-bell at the mansion recalled him to the common round of his usually cheerful existence.

It was just possible that, after all, he had been labouring under some hallucination, and might find his pretty companions as devoted to his comfort as he had lately thought them. At all events, he tried to believe it, and, since it was of no manner of use to remain where he was,—since the clanging sound of the great bell would probably recall all truants to the house,—he hurried thither to perform his toilet.

There was no one in the drawing-room, when he entered it, just as the second bell was ringing. Sir Frederick waited several minutes, and then sent to inquire for the ladies. A message of apology was brought to him. The young ladies had returned late from their walk, but they would join him almost immediately, if he would be kind enough to sit down to dinner without them.

Sir Frederick proceeded at once to the dining-room. He would not pay them the compliment of waiting; though he was by no means in a hurry, for what appeared likely to resemble his former bachelor repasts. Just as the butler was removing the cover from the soup, which had stood long enough to be nearly cold, Clarice and Laura entered the room together.

The moment Sir Frederick looked at his niece, he partly guessed the cause of their delay. Laura had evidently been crying. Her drooping eyelids were still quivering with emotion, and she did not speak. Clarice apologised hastily for herself and her friend. Both the girls bore considerable traces of discomposure in their appearance; and though, at another time, Sir Frederick would have thought, and probably said, that their hasty toilette was by no means unbecoming, and that the haughty flush on Clarice's cheek, the sparkle in her dark eyes, suited her style of beauty,—at this moment he was not disposed to admit the fact, and kept his glances as much as possible averted from her.



Though he had been ungallant enough to sit down to dinner without them, he did not feel in the least disposed to touch a morsel. Never had they seen their good-humoured host so difficult to please. Unconscious, apparently, of having given greater cause for displeasure than being ten minutes too late for dinner, they probably attributed his savage mood to the delay which had intervened; as if, at that moment, he were capable of attaching importance to the minor miseries of cold soup and overdone dishes!

Very little conversation was carried on between them. Clarice, after two or three attempts, which were ungraciously repulsed, gave up the effort. The repast was concluded uncomfortably enough. Sir Frederick did not resort to his old plan for dispelling disagreeable emotions. He even forgot to ask Miss Le Sage, as usual, to take wine with him; it was fortunate that Reynolds was more attentive, and filled her's and Laura's glasses. Sherry had ceased to be an unfailing panacea, and the decanters stood untouched before him, after the servants had left the room.

Occupied by her own thoughts, Laura had not noticed Sir Frederick's discomposure as much as her friend. Had she been more observant of the signs of the times, her first remark would not have related to Mr. Pemberton, and confirmed her uncle's impression that they had been together. Laura, indeed, seemed to have no wish to conceal it, though she spoke with timidity, looking at Sir Frederick with a sort of appealing air, as though, when the subject was once entered upon, she wished him to encourage her to proceed. At present, all she said, however, was that Mr. Pemberton had been greatly disappointed at not finding him at home. He was on the point of going up to London, where literary employment of the kind best suited to his talents was offered to him; and he had not thought it right, now that his services could be dispensed with at Maydwell and Fordington, to lose, by interposing any delay, this opportunity of securing independence. He was to leave the neighbourhood

early the next day, and might be absent for several months.

“ I am glad to hear it,” Sir Frederick answered roughly. “ He has been idling about here long enough ; and, had I seen him, I should certainly have told him that his visits could be dispensed with. I find that they have been made the subject of much gossiping, and have given rise to expectations in his, and perhaps in other minds, which never can be realised.”

These words, and still more the tone in which they were uttered, entirely defeated Laura's attempts at composure. She burst into tears, and, hastily rising, left the room. Clárice seemed disposed to follow her example.

“ I understand that every one but myself is acquainted with this foolish business,” Sir Frederick said, after Laura had quitted them. . “ I am, I find, a blind fool, and it is quite clear that many things of which I cannot in the least approve, are supposed to have received my sanction.

The sooner matters are set upon a right footing, the better."

He got up and walked about the apartment uneasily.

"Laura and I are of very opposite dispositions—I despair of making her comprehend me; and those who appear more candid have their own secrets. No doubt you both think me an old simpleton, for not guessing that two beautiful girls were sure to find lovers and admirers in every person they meet with. You cannot suppose me more stupid and ignorant than I feel myself to be. Holcombe says, all the world supposes that I am going to give the living, if he vacates it, and Laura's hand, to young Pember-ton. He and all the world are mistaken. You may think me as prejudiced as you like, but I cannot surmount my aversion to these Pember-tons. Laura has known of it from the first, and ought not to have encouraged his pretensions. As long as I live, and have any controul over her person or my own property, she shall

not throw herself away. Roger Pemberton, I hear, confidently reckons upon being my heir. According to him, my life is not worth ten years' purchase. In that case,—and, upon my soul, I believe he is right—I feel ten years older than I did yesterday—he can give his brother the living, when it becomes vacant:—or, they may run away together now;—but they shall not have my consent, or any prospect of preferment at my hands.”

Half grieved, half angry, at his strange manner, Clarice rose from her seat at the table. “I think you are very unkind to Laura:”—she said, looking at Sir Frederick with her usually truthful glance, and speaking in a very straightforward manner. “I am quite certain that she has no idea of braving your disapproval; and, if you had listened to her more patiently, she would have given you every explanation you could desire, with reference to herself and Mr. Pemberton. Though I, and perhaps others, may have thought them singularly well adapted to

each other, I do not believe that, until to-day, when they were about to separate for an indefinite period, a word of love has passed between them."

The first syllable she uttered carried conviction to Sir Frederick's mind. He could not imagine her guilty of intentionally deceiving him, and felt ashamed of his violence. As he did not, however, acknowledge his error, Clarice, somewhat offended, prepared to leave him.

Sir Frederick would not suffer her to put her design in practice. He followed her through the door into the drawing-room, declaring that he must speak to her. Laura was so timid he should only distress her; but he wished it to be clearly understood that he could not approve of Lewis Pemberton's paying his addresses to her.

"I shall not know in whom to trust for the future:"—he said, very gravely, "You once told me that you felt confidence in me; but that is over. Why did you not tell me that you were acquainted with this foreign friend of Hol-

combe's?—That this expedition of his to England, was to take you away from us?"

Miss Le Sage started and coloured violently. She seemed unusually nervous,—whether owing to the peculiarity of Sir Frederick's manner, or to his allusion to Baron Yermaloff, could not be told.

"How do you know"—she said, while finishing depriving of its leaves an unfortunate plant that was placed on a stand between them, and which Sir Frederick had been vehemently despoiling of its rose-buds. "Who told you that Baron Yermaloff came to England for the purpose of compelling me to return with him? Is Mr. Holcombe aware of it?"

The luckless Baronet was so overcome by her abrupt confirmation of his hastily uttered surmise respecting the obnoxious stranger, that, for a moment, he was silent. Clarice's agitation increased.

"I wish I could think of you as I did formerly:" she continued:—"That you were as

indulgent and considerate! I should have told you what I have feared, ever since I received my mother's last letter, would be the case. This man's visit has been hanging over me. I knew she would betray me. But you are too passionate. I cannot rely on your discretion, or believe that you will make all the allowance which the case requires. My mother is entitled to respect"—she broke off suddenly. "I must have recourse to others, if she cannot protect me."

Sir Frederick, at that moment, was not in the least in the humour to act the sage and prudent part which Clarice seemed disposed to assign to him. Her tears and blushes were more than any man of his disposition could resist.

"You may think me very presumptuous, but I cannot relinquish the claim to your confidence which you once gave," he said passionately. "In this house, at all events, Clarice, you surely cannot need to call upon any one else to protect you. If the devotion of my whole life—my entire affections, which have long been your's—



can atone for my many defects—for the disparity in years which exists between us—forgive my momentary impatience! Don't talk of that moustachioed fellow taking you back to Italy! I shall certainly shoot him if he proposes it. He is not a bit more worthy of you than I am. There is cunning as well as cruelty in his eyes. A dissipated career is marked in his countenance. Don't trust his promises of reformation. I don't believe a word about his Slavonic estates and splendour. Try if you cannot make yourself happy in an English home, beside a heart, which, whatever be its imperfections, is honest and loves you truly."

Before Clarice could make any answer to this very unexpected addition to her perplexities, the door opened, and the solemn-visaged old butler advancing with as much timidity as he had done when fearful of disturbing his master's slumbers, crossed the room, and placed a card and letter in her hand. The gentleman, Baron Yermaloff, was

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in the hall, and requested to see Miss Le Sage on particular business immediately.

The letter, though she suspected it to be written under compulsion, was in a handwriting which Clarice could not deny had a right to her attention. She trembled as much as her mother had done, when Mustapha stood over her and dictated it; and, turning to Sir Frederick, begged that she might be allowed to receive the Baron. He was, she said, the bearer of messages from her mother.

The old servant had probably taken it for granted that Miss Le Sage's visitor was to be admitted; for the Croatian's boots and spurs were clanking in the hall, while Sir Frederick impatiently exclaimed.

"You cannot expect me to leave you with this man, Clarice! I see that you are terrified. Give me authority to dismiss him, everything else can wait. I do not wish to hurry you. Only have confidence in me, for a moment, and suffer me

to explain to Baron Yermaloff that his journey has been undertaken under a false impression of what your feelings were likely to be."

"Baron Yermaloff understands them perfectly:" said Clarice haughtily. "It is only for my mother—to show that I am not undutiful, or regardless of her claim on my affection, that I must hear what he has to say.—Since you know the position in which we stand towards each other, remain with us, Sir Frederick."

Not altogether satisfied with this ambiguous reply, the Baronet saw with a pang of jealousy the aristocratic-looking foreigner accost Clarice, with an air of intimacy and freedom which his age did not warrant.

His haughty bow to Sir Frederick, and the silence he maintained after the first salutation, conveyed an intimation that he wished him to take his departure. Whatever might be the nature of the commission with which her mother had charged him, it was evidently his intention to declare it to Miss Le Sage privately.

Sir Frederick, on the contrary, was determined to remain. At the moment when Clarice had authorised his doing so, Baron Yermaloff had been crossing the drawing-room, and, consequently, must have heard her. He was by no means in the humour to grant this person whom he persisted in regarding as an adventurer, the *tête-à-tête* he manifestly desired. The two gentlemen looked at each other vindictively ; neither seemed disposed to give way.

Baron Yermaloff spoke first.

"This young lady," he said, in excellent English, "will perhaps allow me a few moments conversation. I am her mother's representative ; and have her sanction, as the guardian of her person, to restore her to the maternal protection which she has rashly quitted."

Sir Frederick stepped forward quickly, "You must satisfy me, as well as Miss Le Sage, Baron Yermaloff, respecting these somewhat lofty-sounding pretensions. I can scarcely believe that her mother would consider so young a man as you appear to be, a fitting protector for her daughter.

Baron Yermaloff looked at him with considerable astonishment.

"Age is not always a guarantee for discretion, Sir Frederick Derwent;" he answered somewhat sarcastically, "nor has Miss Le Sage's residence under your roof escaped remark. Pardon me, if, all things considered, and whatever advantage in this respect you may possess, I deem myself a more unexceptionable guardian for a young lady like Clarice, than any other man, especially an unmarried one, can possibly be."

"Am I to believe this, Clarice," Sir Frederick said; an expression of pain such as she had never seen even illness bring into his countenance, settling on his features. "Do you authorise this gentleman's claim of exclusive controul over you?"

"No:" exclaimed Clarice hurriedly. "It is only for my mother's sake that I have consented to see him. I will not return to Italy. If necessary, I will appeal to the laws of this country for protection. It was for this reason that Colonel

and Mrs. Derwent advised, and my own mother permitted me to leave her, and reside in England."

Sir Frederick's countenance brightened.

"Surely, such extreme measures cannot be required:" he said. "This gentleman will not press farther a proposal which is distasteful to your feelings. While it is your pleasure to continue to be my niece's friend and companion, I trust that, in my house, there exists no danger of your meeting with annoyance. I will undertake to shield you from it."

"Sir Frederick will pardon my observing, that Miss Le Sage's residence at Maydwell has given occasion to much unpleasant observation. Her absent parent's feelings have been severely tried, by the report of some of our compatriots who visited this country in the autumn, and witnessed his very pointed attentions," said Baron Yermaloff, whose temper seemed considerably chafed by the Baronet's opposition. "His own conduct in detaining a young lady of fortune,—a minor,—

against her mother's expressed wishes, exposes him to imputations which no man of honour would willingly incur."

"We will settle that point hereafter;" said Sir Frederick. "At present, this lady's interests, which are more important than your opinion of my character, must have our undivided attention. Her wishes have been expressed as clearly as her parent's. Is it your pleasure to comply with them, and leave my house? I am sorry to find myself obliged to act inhospitably and uncourtously to a stranger; but you have heard that Miss Le Sage has determined to remain in England, and can require no farther information respecting her intentions."

While speaking, Sir Frederick had advanced nearer to Clarice, as if to protect her. She laid her hand upon his arm. "Do not be so hasty;" she said, "Baron Yermaloff does not mean to affront you. He is a stranger and unacquainted with the laws and customs of England, which are very different from those of his own country.

He imagines that his being the husband of my mother gives him a right to tyrannize over her child ; but I have known too much of his authority to submit to it again. I have seen my poor mother shed too many tears, not to know that my return would but be the excuse for yet more bitter altercations between them ; and subject her to more insane violence from one who is accustomed to see his own wild passions give him power over all around him. Suffer me to settle this matter at once and for ever."

The announcement of the paternal relationship in which the Croatian nobleman stood towards Clarice, lifted at least a dozen years from Sir Frederick's shoulders. He felt himself to be a happier, and a much younger man, than he had done ten minutes before ; and a closer investigation of the foreigner's made-up physiognomy inclined the Baronet to doubt whether, in reality, he had as much the advantage of him in seniority as Yermaloff had insinuated.

The lines in the Baron's forehead, about the



eyes, and those at the corners of his sarcastic mouth, deepened as Clarice firmly expressed her intention of placing herself, and the fortune of which she seemed very suddenly to have acquired possession, under the care of proper authorities, until the rapidly approaching period should arrive when she would become by law independent.

"Madame Yermaloff is very unfortunate in her child," he said, angrily, "or I have been made an ambassador in what, it appears, was a preconcerted scheme between you. Your undutiful conduct will shock her vastly. I cannot answer for the consequences, in her delicate and very declining state of health."

Sir Frederick was becoming impatient. Baron Yermaloff turned towards him, indignantly.

"As for you, Sir, I bid you no adieu. I consider that you have interfered very unwarrantably between a mother and her child. It is easy to guess your motive. I trust your scheme will not answer. It would grieve me, and this young lady's amiable parent, to find her large pro-

perty converted into the means of freeing your embarrassed estate from overwhelming debt and disorder."

Sir Frederick Derwent did not condescend to answer him. Baron Yermaloff's hand was on the latch of the door, as he concluded his speech. The drawing-room bell had rung loudly some minutes before, and Reynolds was waiting to show him across the hall.

It would be difficult to say whether Clarice or her host was most embarrassed. Perhaps she was thinking of her mother, for her tears were flowing as rapidly as Laura's had done when she left the dinner-table. She did not give Sir Frederick time to approach her, as seemed to be his intention ; but, hastily, and in great confusion, left the room by another door, almost at the same instant when her father-in-law quitted it.

## CHAPTER IV.

SIR FREDERICK walked up and down the drawing-room, in a state of great excitement, after Clarice was gone. Baron Yermaloff's insulting construction of his motives for detaining the young heiress, was so completely at variance with the feelings which, only a few moments previously, had induced him to offer his hand to his niece's unprotected companion, that, at first, he was inclined to regard the foreigner's offensive remarks as unworthy of farther notice; but, gradually, the conviction that others might entertain the same opinion forced itself upon him.

Already Clarice's youth and beauty had checked the declaration, while they encouraged the growth of his passion. With every advantage of position, apparently, on his side, he had feared to be accused of presumption. The discovery of her large fortune seemed to make his pretensions

absolutely ridiculous. He would have given the world not to have tendered a proposal, which, he felt convinced that the gay girl would laugh at and reject; and which might be viewed, by worldly-minded persons, in a yet more mortifying light.

Nevertheless, as the evening wore on, the dread he for some time experienced, of reading in her countenance the hopelessness of his suit, yielded to annoyance at being left entirely alone. He thought he had a right to be excessively angry with the two girls, for the deception they had practised upon him; but he did not understand their taking up the matter so seriously. Sir Frederick was by no means of an implacable disposition. As his irritation subsided, he longed to see the pretty offenders enter as usual together; and doubted whether he should be able to give them as severe a reprimand as their offence undeniably merited. He sent to enquire whether they were coming down, when Reynolds brought in the tea things; but Laura had been weeping

so much that she dared not venture into his presence; and Clarice could not conquer her embarrassment sufficiently to return to the drawing-room alone, and sent her excuses with her friend's.

If Sir Frederick had entertained any lingering hope of having created a favourable impression in the mind of his young guest, it did not survive the disappointment inflicted by her refusal to join him. He regarded her absence as purposely intended to discourage his audacious pretensions; and the unpleasant sensations which might have passed off, if he had seen her, with her usually frank and cordial air, performing the womanly duties which Laura generally resigned to her, or charming him good-humouredly by her sweet voice and exquisite skill in music, now, during the long evening hours, which of late had flown so rapidly, became insufferably painful. He sat up later than usual, in the vague expectation that the two girls might change their intention and come down to him; and went to his room, dissatisfied and unhappy.

Laura and Clarice were sorry to hear, in the morning, that Sir Frederick did not mean to breakfast with them. Though he did not make a constant practice of joining them, he had generally done so, lately ; and they considered his absence as a sign that he was still angry with them. Reynolds told Miss Derwent that his master was busy, writing letters ; but that he would speak to her before he went out.

Neither of the girls felt altogether free from blame ; still, they heartily wished that Sir Frederick had met them, with his usual kindness, at the breakfast-table, and allowed them to explain the circumstances which had occasioned so much perplexity.

Clarice, in particular, when the master of the house appeared inclined to avoid her society, felt very uncomfortable. She retreated to her room, as soon as the cloth was removed, leaving Laura, in some trepidation, to make what excuses she could for their inconsiderateness.

Sir Frederick looked even graver than his niece

had anticipated, when he came into the apartment. Clarice and Laura were generally such inseparable companions, especially when any difficulties threatened the latter, that he perhaps expected to see them together ; for he cast a rapid glance around as he entered, though he had not invited Miss Le Sage to join the family conclave.

He did not, however, enquire for her ; neither did he advert to Lewis Pemberton. The visit of the Croatian Baron seemed uppermost in his thoughts. He asked Laura what could have induced her to practice such a deception upon him, as was involved in bringing Miss Le Sage to Maydwell, and inducing him to consider her as Laura's companion.

" Indeed, Uncle Frederick, I am afraid that we acted very foolishly," said Laura, taking his hand. " But, in the first place, it was your own mistake ; and, in the second, Clarice has always said that, if she had come here as a princess, you could not have treated her more kindly."

" That has very little to do with it, Laura,"

replied her uncle. "It certainly would have made a vast difference if you had introduced your friend to me as the daughter of a brother officer of your father's, and a young lady of fortune. The first part of Miss Le Sage's history I heard by accident. I am not at all obliged to you for leaving me to learn the last through the intervention of this foreign Baron. You have certainly done your best to make me pre-eminently ridiculous. From the beginning of our acquaintance, I have been acting under a false impression ; and you and your fair friend have no doubt been laughing at the innumerable absurdities I have committed."

He got up and walked to the window, as if not wishing Laura to see the expression of his countenance, crimsoned over as it was by mortification.

"We must have been very ungrateful," she answered, "to have any such thoughts. Everything seemed to arrange itself naturally ; and we foolishly imagined that it would spare you trouble and uneasiness, if we said nothing about Clarice's



wish to keep for a time out of the way of her mother's connections. It is never agreeable to expose the follies of a parent; and Clarice's large fortune had been such a constant source of annoyance to her, that it was a pleasure to banish it from her recollection, as well as to receive kindness which was perfectly disinterested. She has said, a hundred times, that the months she has passed at Maydwell have been by far the happiest she has ever known."

Sir Frederick came back from the window. He sat down by his niece, and assured her that nothing gave him greater pleasure than affording Miss Le Sage the protection which his brother had promised. He only regretted not having known sooner how much she stood in need of a vigilant guardian.

He listened patiently to Laura's explanation of her friend's embarrassing position, and of the circumstances connected with her mother's marriage with Baron Yermáloff. After Major Le Sage's death, his widow had become reconciled

to her parents, and had had a considerable life income settled upon her by her father. The largest part of his property was placed by his will in the hands of trustees for the benefit of her child, and a liberal allowance granted to the mother for the purposes of her education and maintenance.

Mrs. Le Sage's wealth had attracted the mercenary foreigner; and, not satisfied with his rich prize, he tormented her continually, after she became his wife, in order to obtain controul over her daughter's destiny. Clarice, as a mere child, had run great risk of being married to a dissipated associate of the Baron's at the gaming-table. As she grew up, the habits of her mother's household became more and more distasteful to her. Colonel Derwent had thought the young girl's position one of great peril, and had invited her to reside in his family until she came of age. He was then on the point of returning home to England.

The sudden death of her kind friends had

delayed Clarice's departure and exposed her to much additional persecution from Yermaloff, who, as the period of her majority approached, became more than ever bent upon making the disposal of her hand the object of his interested schemes. She had with difficulty escaped from an alliance with the handsome, but extravagant and dissipated Count Czekeli, whose excesses had exhausted the revenues drawn from the hereditary estates of his family, bordering upon Yermaloff's own impoverished domains. A daring attempt of Czekeli's, during one of the winter sledging parties on the frozen plains, to carry her off to his lonely castle among the swamps of the Save, had been connived at by the Baron, and nearly met with success. She had in consequence resolved never to place herself again in so unprotected a position, among men so unscrupulous and determined.

Fedor's intervention had alone saved her from becoming the wife of a man whose vices she held in abhorrence; and whose later career, public

and private, had obliterated all those agreeable recollections of early friendship which she still cherished concerning his younger brother. Even in the lax society of the Italian capitals, Czekeli was a marked man. Her gay mother had shrunk from consigning her daughter to his charge ; and terrified at the idea of openly opposing her arbitrary lord and master, urged Clarice to put in practice her original resolution, and take advantage of the opportunity afforded by Laura's leaving Italy, to remove herself privately beyond the influence of her angry father-in-law. Sir Frederick Derwent's cordial and frank reception had opened to her, as she considered, a safe and eligible asylum ; and she was too little acquainted with the world to know in what amount of embarrassment her unwise silence might involve him and herself.

As usual, the reference to her parents and their unfulfilled intentions occasioned Laura much emotion. She was still unable to mention them with tranquillity. Sir Frederick soothed her ;

and granted the forgiveness for which she petitioned. His manner was peculiarly affectionate in speaking. Laura's eyes filled with tears, as she kissed him silently.

"That must be a seal of amnesty:" he observed, rising—"Tell your friend, in case I should not see her, as she seems determined to keep out of my way, that the longer she remains your guest, the better I shall be pleased; and that I quite forgive you both for not letting me into your secrets."

He returned Laura's embrace very fervently, and went out, saying that he had an engagement with the Rector, and should not see them again till dinner-time.

It was such a relief to Laura that her uncle did not mention Lewis Pemberton's name, that she felt perfectly satisfied with the result of their interview. Sir Frederick appeared, on the contrary, graver than before, when, after carefully sealing and putting away the papers with which he had been occupied, he left the house by the

door of the garden-parlour, and took his way, across the grove, to the Rectory.

He was in a better humour with his old friend than he had felt since his return from abroad. Perhaps he was, for the first time, disposed to allow Holcombe to be right in thinking that the young girls he had admitted into his family were likely to give him a good deal of trouble. At all events, he walked straight across the lawn, and tapped at the breakfast-room window; eliciting a shriek of delighted surprise from Penelope, who had just arrived, and was sitting exactly opposite to it.

Another pleasant and unexpected meeting was in store for Sir Frederick. Lady Fortescue, who had gone to Bath for the winter, to complete the recovery of her stricken household from the effects of the cholera, had brought the Rector's sister to her brother's house, after a long visit which she had been paying to the widow in that gay city.

Penelope had been enjoying herself, in a quiet way, as much as she ever did in Sir Frederick's absence. She still had her bonnet on, and, with her face shaded by a lace veil and becoming flowers, looked remarkably well.

Sir Frederick was at home among them immediately; at least as much so as it was in their power to make him. Lady Fortescue had not seen him since his illness, and her compassionate glances touched him. Penelope also seemed affected. After all, it was only when women arrived at a rational time of life that they became possessed of real feeling.

The widow had a great deal of news to communicate. She had got poor Gawkey satisfactorily off her hands, at last. He was on his way to India, with a very pretty wife, whom she had decided to be a person likely to suit him exactly, the first time they danced together, at one of the Thursday's balls at the Rooms. He had procured an extension of leave, on account of the sharp attack he had undergone of cholera; and

had, consequently, a little more time than the limited period he had anticipated, for wooing a bride, after the disappointment inflicted upon him by Clarice. With Lady Fortescue's able generalship, it had proved amply sufficient.

The gay season which she had been spending had revived the widow's energies, and refreshed the languid Penelope. Sir Frederick was scarcely a match for them; and the soft glances of the amiable spinster, the *feu de joie* kept up by Lady Fortescue's eyes and tongue, were almost more than he could stand. Many of Sir Andrew's old colleagues were residing in Bath, and had paid great attention to his animated relict. She felt wonderfully better for the change of air, and wished that he had given it a trial.

"The young ladies have not taken half care enough of you, Sir Frederick," she said tenderly. "Soldiers and sailors, and, next to them, their wives or widows, make the best nurses. How should such inexperienced creatures, with their heads full of nonsense and love affairs, know how



to deal with rheumatism, which is sure to follow, at our time of life, in the train of acute disorders? Sir Andrew said, when we first married, that the hospital system of employing none but men was the best:—women were such twaddlers! But I taught him better. I soon got into his ways, and could hear the regimental surgeon tell the most shocking stories without flinching—yes, and even help him in his duties. I had a great inclination, I assure you, to come back from Bath, and see that you were properly attended to.”

This bold declaration on the part of the widow, made Penelope blush. She felt herself to be much too young for any demonstration of the kind; but she sighed deeply, as if lamenting her inability to be of use.

Their sympathy was by no means disagreeable to Sir Frederick. He had worked himself up into the belief that no woman, under thirty, would bestow an atom of it upon him; and was rather disposed to regret having allowed his affections

to range within that prescribed limit. After all, the widow or Penelope might have reciprocated his regard, instead of making him ridiculous.

This was not precisely the moment for coming to any resolution. His mind was otherwise occupied; and, after idling away half an hour with the ladies, he told Mr. Holcombe that he must carry him off to the study, where he wrote his sermons on Saturdays, as he wanted to consult him on some matters of business.

Mr. Holcombe was so much in the habit of seeing his friend make affairs, even of importance, wait upon the pleasure of the moment, that he was rather surprised at the present change in his manner. He was glad to find that Derwent was returning to his old habit of confiding in him, and led the way, at once, to the somewhat dreary little apartment, at the back of the house, looking into the kitchen garden, where he perhaps found least distraction from his weekly amount of clerical duty.

It was quite evident to a man of the world,

like Mr. Holcombe, that Sir Frederick had something on his mind. He had seen it even while the latter was jesting with Lady Fortescue, and his wife and sister ; and there was no mistaking the troubled look that came into his features, when, with an air of fatigue, he took possession of one of the two morocco easy-chairs in the study.

Whatever might be his private causes for uneasiness, however, Sir Frederick did not immediately disclose them. He talked to his friend on several subjects, which scarcely seemed of sufficient importance to account for his having thought it necessary to take him away from the drawing-room. Presently, he altered his tone, and mentioned his illness, and that, at one time, he had apprehended its terminating fatally. He said, gravely, how much he had then wished for Mr. Holcombe. No one else understood the state of his affairs half so well. He had determined, as soon as the Rector returned, not to lose an instant before consulting him about them. It was quite impossible to say, one day, what

might come to pass the next. The best plan was to make the most of the present moment.

Mr. Holcombe guessed that the Baronet wished to make a fresh settlement of his property. Was he going to be married? He pondered for a few seconds, and looked at his friend; but Sir Frederick had not in the least the air of a bridegroom. He appeared unusually grave and in earnest.

He showed Mr. Holcombe some letters which he had written respecting the involvement of his affairs. His views were very clear, and he meditated, by a considerable sacrifice of income, paying off his remaining debts. In case of his life terminating sooner than in the natural course of things might be expected, he pointed out how these were to be defrayed; and patiently listened to his friend's suggestions.

When they had discussed this matter at full length, Sir Frederick's mind seemed easier. He wrote down the result, and placed the papers in his pocket-book, which, his friend noticed, con-

tained more than one sealed letter, though the post-time in the village was past. They now conversed on lighter topics.

Sir Frederick asked Mr. Holcombe whether Baron Yermaloff had confided to him the true motive of his journey to England. Miss Le Sage proved to be the heiress of a large estate ; and he had had some difficulty in preventing the Rector's foreign friend, armed with her mother's authority, from carrying the young lady off, much against her will, to the continent.

"To tell you the truth, I was half afraid of your getting into a quarrel with Yermaloff, when he informed me, yesterday, of his having seen Miss Le Sage, and that she was the Baroness's daughter :"—said Mr. Holcombe. "I had not a conception of what brought him over here. Abroad, one hears so little of people's families and domestic affairs ; and Madame Yermaloff is not at all the kind of woman to boast of having a grown up daughter. He is a quarrelsome fellow, and has fought half a dozen duels in his time,

for anything or nothing. I was heartily glad when he took himself off, this morning, to Stanmore Park, where a host of his countrymen are staying."

"I knew that he was gone. You would not otherwise, have seen me here," said Sir Frederick, shortly. "I am not in the least partial to foreigners; and your friend does not strike me as being at all a favourable specimen."

"Ah, you must not judge of people whom you have seen only at a disadvantage," said the Rector charitably. "Yermaloff has a disagreeable temper. Madame told Mrs. Holcombe that, nine times out of ten, when she was dressed for a ball, she did not know whether she would be allowed to go, or whether her *bête sauvage*, as she tenderly calls him, would order her to stay at home. It is the fashion to pity her extravagantly, and, it is said, she leads a strange life full of vicissitudes. One week they are rolling in riches, — her diamonds the envy of the Neapolitan ladies; the next, no one knows to what straights they may

be reduced. Like most men of his class on the continent, Yermaloff plays high ; and his humour varies according to his success or losses at the gaming-table."

"I wonder you patronise such people, Holcombe ;" said Sir Frederick, gravely. "I wish, with all my soul, that you had not invited him to your house."

"Oh ! I assure you, he is received in the first circles abroad. His vices are those of a gentleman," said Holcombe : carelessly. "Only don't get into a quarrel with him. He is a confirmed duellist and a practised shot, and would wing a man as coolly as a partridge."

"A character I detest !" said Sir Frederick, rising. "Do not let us talk any more about him. I thought him an adventurer, from the first moment I caught sight of him. You say, nevertheless, that he is a man of some standing in his own country—a gentleman by birth and station ?"

"Decidedly :"—said the Rector. "He has

large estates, in some barbaric district, which he leaves very wisely at the disposal of the bears and wolves, except for a short time at the proper season, when he takes parties there to hunt, and lives, it is said, *en Prince*. There was one while we were at Naples, made up for a Russian Grand Duke, when some frightful excesses were committed; but, still, I have never heard any one question Baron Yermaloff's claim to be treated as a gentleman. His wife, though a terrible goose in some respects, has just that description of talent which is useful and agreeable in society; and she is one of the most lady-like persons I ever met with in my life."

Sir Frederick, now, of his own accord, proposed returning to the ladies. While he was talking to the widow, Mr. Holcombe found time to whisper to his wife, unheard by the rest of the party.

"You must contrive to keep Derwent to dinner, Soph. I can't quite make him out, but there is something in his manner which I do not like. Tell Penelope to make herself pleasant.



The widow will do so without orders from headquarters, and is getting all her forces in array for a grand attack. Anything is better than letting him quarrel, and perhaps get his brains blown out in a duel with that bloodthirsty fellow, Yermaloff. We must keep them out of each other's way."

No one could accuse Mrs. Holcombe and Penelope of not doing their best to second his wishes. Sir Frederick found it quite impossible to tear himself away. A message had been sent up to the Hall, without his knowledge, to say that he would dine at the Rectory. It was not the first time such liberties had been taken with his freedom. His fair enemies won every position, and he was forced to submit.

The harmony of the afternoon was not disturbed by any mention of the martial Croatian. Lady Fortescue was in her gayest spirits, and only sorry that, owing to her not expecting the day to pass so pleasantly, her carriage was at the door before she could have conceived it possible

that the early hour had arrived at which she had unfortunately ordered it.

It was some comfort to think that the year was in its youth—the gay season before her. Sir Frederick had never seemed more inclined to plan merry makings, pic-nics, and archeries ; and had even invented a new cricketing costume, in which the widow's favourite colours were to predominate, for the summer. She did not, for a moment, suspect that any ominous forebodings could lurk under his gallant *badinage*. It was “Auld Lang Syne,” played by the regimental band, without one false note ; and her heart beat high with triumph, as the Baronet led her to her carriage.

She was not mistaken in thinking that he pressed her hand with more than usual fervour. He even ventured to detain it, while he stood, in the attitude she liked so much to see him assume, with one foot on the step, talking to her. He did not forget to tell the coachman to take great care of his mistress ; and seemed to remove

with regret the impediment to their proceeding. His last words to her were, if possible, more tender than any sentence he had ever uttered at parting from her before.

He did not take leave of the Holcombes immediately after the widow's departure. Their pleasant reception had touched his heart, and he stood listening to Penelope's singing; though, perhaps, without any very definite idea of what meaning the plaintive words of the ballad were intended to convey. She did not quite understand his manner, but she caught him looking at her with a half-regretful expression which made her feel considerably embarrassed. The soft glance with which she met his own, and then dropped her eyelids timidly, was more eloquent than anything Penelope was likely to utter. Mrs. Holcombe gave her credit for being so remarkably silent, and sent her into the little hall of the cottage, with a candle to assist Sir Frederick in finding his great coat, which, as an

invalid, these kind-hearted females considered it highly necessary that he should wear.

As no one accompanied them, it was of course impossible to know exactly what took place in the crowded receptacle for cricket-bats, fishing-rods, parasols, cloaks and coats, which the miniature hall presented. The search however appeared to occupy a longer time than was absolutely necessary; and, when Penelope returned to the drawing-room, her cheeks were flushed, and there was more animation in her countenance than usual.

Mrs. Holcombe could only guess at the particular event which made that evening a memorable one to Penelope, by her sister-in-law's positively refusing to allow her brother to bestow upon her the frigid kiss which she was in the habit of receiving patiently. On this occasion, she declined any salutation of the kind, and marched off, with her candle, to meditate, not altogether fancy free, in her maiden solitude, on

the extraordinary circumstance which almost entitled her to consider herself as Sir Frederick Derwent's betrothed ; and to wonder at the very emphatic terms in which he had taken leave of her. Penelope felt very justly that she had never had such a chance before ; and she was conscious, also, that she had nothing with which to reproach herself. She did not quite understand Sir Frederick ; but she knew that, of the opportunity granted, she had made the very most. It was not the fault of this persevering young woman, if, in her own classic phraseology,—nothing came of it.

## CHAPTER V.

It had been a relief to Sir Frederick, as he faced the bitterly-cold March wind, which was whistling through the leafless branches of the grove, not to see any light in the drawing-room windows at the Hall. His parting with Penelope was almost too much for the tender hearted Baronet, and had carried him beyond the strict bounds of decorum. He thought, with considerable emotion, how many pleasant evenings of his life had been passed at the Rectory. After all, he did not like to be too severe upon Holcombe. Many circumstances which he had noticed during the day inclined him to think that his old friend was very sincerely attached to him. He could not feel certain that any people would miss him more than the Holcombes, if

this were the last time he was fated to dine with them.

He went straight to his own apartments ; and, the next morning, still, apparently, in an unsociable humour, he rose early and intended, as had been his custom for many years of his life, to dispense with breakfast. His horse was brought round to the door by a groom ; but the servants had been too near losing their kind master in the winter,—Dixon in particular had suffered too much anxiety respecting his health,—not to take more care of him than formerly. A bright fire was burning in the study, whither he descended for a moment to place in his desk the papers about which he had consulted Mr. Holcombe ; and the housekeeper followed him into the room, respectfully, with a cup of hot coffee. The morning was raw and cold yet, she said,—the sun scarcely risen :—she was sorry to see him going out so early—she hoped he would not forget that he had recently been an invalid, and that the season was very treacherous.

Sir Frederick seemed pleased with the attention shown him, and talked to the old servant, gravely but kindly, while he drank the coffee. When Reynolds, the grey headed butler, brought him his great coat in the hall, his master chided him for being up so soon. The old man was a great favourite, and more indulged than any one else in the establishment. He and Dixon stood at the entrance, while Sir Frederick mounted ; and he did not forget to notice them with a look and kindly gesture, as he rode away.

Some mysterious impulse, which at the time they did not understand, made the two domestics follow him, a few moments afterwards, to the lodge-gates. Sir Frederick was still in sight, proceeding very slowly down the road, receiving bows and curtseys from the villagers. He returned, as usual, every salutation bestowed upon him, while he passed. The sun had, by this time, peered through the mist, and was casting slanting beams upon the cottage windows, through



the boles of the old trees which overhung the park wall of Maydwell Place.

At a short distance from the Lodge, a road leading from the county town turned into the village street. Sir Frederick drew in his rein, and paused as if waiting for some one to join him. Presently, a gentleman belonging to the neighbourhood, to whom Reynolds knew that a note had been despatched the day before, cantered up, followed by a groom. He joined their master, who had taken no attendant with him; and the two old servants, after watching them till they could see them no longer, returned to the house, with graver countenances than when they left it, talking earnestly to each other. Sir Frederick and his companion, meanwhile, rode on together past the angle formed by the Fordington lane. Very soon, they turned down another which ran parallel to it, in the direction of the sea, but was much less frequented.

At the same hour in the morning, the surly farmer at Languard was going about his fields,

and Rebecca Pemberton was preparing the unsavoury repast which they were now left alone to enjoy. Roger had not been at all better-tempered, since Lewis's departure. It was noticed by the men on the farm how much the removal of the silent restraint imposed by his brother's manner had caused him to degenerate. Harder and harsher was his bearing than ever, and his lowering brow had grown more oppressively dark.

He was mounted on a thick-legged cart-horse, and nothing in his appearance denoted that he belonged to a station much above that of a common labourer, as he rode clumsily down the middle of a rutted lane, his horse and himself filling up the narrow road. It was true that it was one seldom pursued, and leading only to some disused gravel pits ; but, on this occasion, a light phaeton disputed his possession of the way. The foreign-sounding oaths and ejaculations vented by its occupants on his stupidity, were wasted on the surly yeoman, who plodded on, with his head buried between his high

shoulders, and his hat pulled down over his ears, heedless of their passionate injunctions to leave the road clear.

When the pole of the carriage nearly touched his horse's flank, Roger Pemberton drew to one side, staring rudely at the moustachioed strangers, without appearing to understand the abuse lavished upon him. He seemed, in his own dull way, to feel some curiosity respecting their intentions, and rode on slowly in the wake of the carriage. After a time, he opened with the handle of his stick a gate into a field, and crossed it. The persons in the carriage, who had looked back more than once, seemed glad to be rid of his company, and speedily forgot his existence.

The lane from Maydwell to the sea, which Sir Frederick and his friend were pursuing, went along the other side of the hedge of the field that Roger Pemberton had entered. Perhaps the sound of their voices had attracted him. The road was sunk deep between high banks, and they did not see him, or hear the foot-fall of

his horse, in the soft, newly turned-up soil. He could even approach near enough to catch a few words of their conversation, as he slowly followed them up the hill. When they came to a gate, he paused and let them pass it, and then went on after them.

Whatever might be the intentions of the parties, who, by circuitous tracks, at that early hour, seemed gradually approaching the same point, Roger Pemberton appeared to think it no concern of his to place any impediment in the way of their proceedings. After pausing at the top of the hill, to watch the direction taken by the two horsemen, he wheeled his clumsy steed round, and, with less caution, clattered back through the first opening, and stopped at the yard-gate of his own farm-house.

He was not generally of a communicative disposition. Frequently, he and Rebecca did not exchange a syllable at breakfast, dinner or supper; and Roger had been still more taciturn since Lewis was not there to be tormented. On.

this occasion, however, he seemed disposed to be more jocose than ordinary, as he swallowed down large spoonfuls of a sort of stirabout, or thick porridge, on which he usually breakfasted;—Rebecca's sloe-leaf tea, diluted with quantities of water and skim-milk, not suiting the taste of her domestic giant. There was nothing, now, to relieve the grim economy of the household. The high, pale, patient brow of Lewis was no longer to be seen at their board. The garden door remained unopened; and the flowers must have withered and died uncared for, by this time, under the breath of that cold, ungenial spring. No kindly hand had sheltered them from the cutting frost, and the long prevailing easterly wind.

“There's Derwent, and the Scotch Colonel from the Barracks, gone up to the Little Pits, before eight o'clock in the morning, and a couple of whiskered fools from Stanmore Park on the way to meet them!” he said, between his mouthfuls of porridge. “I wonder what's in

the wind, now ! Some plaguy piece of nonsense, I'll be bound. It was not my place to baulk them ; and I only heard a word or two of what they were saying, on the other side of the hedge. Hast ever thought, Dame, how thee wouldst like to be mistress down to Maydwell, if anything happened to the Baronet ? I warrant, thee couldst dress as fine, and hold thee head as high, as e'er a lady among 'em !”

Rebecca Pemberton, almost for the first time in her life, blushed scarlet. “ Lewis would be surprised,” she said, her inveterate dislike of her brother-in-law still uppermost, “ if such a thing occurred, and not best pleased. I don't hardly know what I should think about it.”

“ Derwent had a narrow miss of it, in the winter ;” said Roger, chuckling. “ I cannot tell how it is,—I ain't superstitious,—but there was a look in his face, as I caught sight of him, through the knobs of the old oak stumps in Hunter's lane, that I never saw before. He seemed like a man riding in his sleep or in a

dream. The foreigners, on the contrary, were laughing and jeering, laying wagers about the pigeon-shooting, next week, and not a bit out of spirits."

Bad as she was, Rebecca Pemberton was a woman. She now guessed her husband's meaning, and became slightly paler.

"Oh Roger, ought you not to have done something to stop them? I should be sorry to hear that anything dreadful had happened, and you so near them without lifting a finger. People will say it is because Sir Frederick and you have never pulled well together."

"Folks may say what they like!" said Roger, his vindictive passions rising. "I was a fool to speak of it to you. No one saw that I was watching them. If I had interfered, Derwent would have called me an impudent fellow; and the insolent foreign chaps would have laid their switches across my shoulders, as he once did his cart-whip. Dost think I have ever forgiven or forgotten it? If all the blood was pouring out

of his body like water, and I had only to lay a finger on the hole to stop it, hang me, if I would do it!"

His wife shuddered.

"Keep your tongue from wagging, Dame," he added savagely. "Who knows what fool's errand the young sparks were off upon to the Little Pits? I did not ask them, and they swore at me roundly for riding along the road in front of them."

He got up moodily as he spoke, pushing away the empty bason from before him. Rebecca did not answer. She was revolving in her mind, now that the slight and unusual compassionate impulse had passed, the vast difference it would entail upon them, if Sir Frederick Derwent were, at that moment, lying stiff and cold on the grassy plot of ground by the margin of the gravel pits. She locked the tea-caddy with her usual care, nevertheless, and went about her household labours with parsimonious frugality. Roger lounged about the farm, without moving far from



the house; though he had talked of having business at Fordington. In the minds of both husband and wife, a sort of presentiment, was gaining strength,—a kind of change was working, as though some important crisis in their destiny was at hand. A dark flush of triumphant malice more than once deepened the tint of Roger's coarse skin. His wife, for the first time, in the midst of the realities of life, found that her thoughts were distracted from the hams she was salting, by visionary fancies.

Meanwhile, Colonel Mac Alpine, the widow's sworn ally, and Sir Frederick Derwent, rode on to the secluded rendez-vous, which, as Roger Pemberton rightly conjectured, had been selected for a hostile purpose. Baron Yermaloff, half savage as he was, had not dreamed of any other mode of settling their dispute. He considered that Sir Frederick had grossly insulted him, and angrily resented the influence which he supposed him to have exerted over Clarice. The insolent terms of the letter he had left at the Lodge, the

preceding day, which announced him to be on his way to Stanmore Park, to solicit the assistance of a friend in making the needful arrangements, had left to Sir Frederick, according to the opinions usually held by men of his cast of character, no choice but to meet him. He was not likely to hesitate about granting to the Baron the satisfaction, which, that gentleman declared, was due to his wounded honour.

He did not like the kind of thing. He had lately begun to think that life was given for better purposes than to be wasted in idle pleasures, or thrown away for the gratification of unruly passions. But the self-denying precepts of Christianity had not been with him the study of a lifetime. Yermaloff's insinuations respecting his motives for detaining Clarice still chafed him sorely. His inclination to chastise the presumption and arrogance of the foreign nobleman, was too strong to be combated by the religious impressions which his mind had received during his illness. He felt that the action he was about to

commit was contrary to the very essence of the law by which he had lately tried to walk, but Lewis Pemberton was no longer beside him. He strove to think that the young clergyman had deceived him; and that he was, in fact, a being of a different stamp to himself;—that the same rule did not suit them. Holcombe's influence was already beginning to tell upon him, and though the Rector of Maydwell would have strongly condemned the course his friend was adopting, the worldly tone of his conversation disposed Sir Frederick to take a different view of his present position to that which it would have assumed when his thoughts were purified by suffering in his own person, and deep anxiety for others.

His mood was not a buoyant one, as he rode on to fulfil his engagement. The world had always treated Sir Frederick remarkably well, and he had lately been in a better humour with it than ever. It was more difficult to him than it would have been, some months before, to think of the encounter before him lightly.

He had arranged his affairs, in case of the worst. It was highly necessary, and had cost him much trouble to do this. Altogether, he was greatly fatigued and excited; and it was still like a dream to him, when he found himself placed opposite to his antagonist, the ground measured, and the word given to fire.

Not one of the party present in the field had anticipated the result. Sir Frederick least of all. He was always a bad shot. Baron Yermaloff, on the contrary, was known to be an excellent one. Yet it was the Croatian nobleman who was stretched on the sod, while his opponent escaped injury.

Scarcely any measures had been taken to provide for this contingency. The foreigners had treated the whole thing as a matter of course. Yermaloff had fought a dozen duels, without scathe or scar, yet he now lay, as they apprehended, bleeding to death before their eyes.

There was no surgeon on the ground. Stanmore Park was many miles distant. Even

Fordington was too far off to be reached with safety. A brief consultation was held. One of the gentlemen remembered having seen the tall gables of the old house on the hill, near which they had passed, and asked if the wounded man could not be conveyed thither.

A shudder passed through Sir Frederick's frame, when he found that Yermaloff was to be transported to Languard. It seemed an evil omen. Some ill-fortune, he was certain, would accrue to himself and all concerned, if they meddled with the surly brute on the hill-top. He could not, however, object. Yermaloff's wound was bleeding fast. Such means as the Colonel's experience, and that of the foreign officer also present, could suggest, were employed to stop the effusion. He was lifted carefully into the carriage, which was driven at a foot's pace and with many pauses, to the rude dwelling-house of the churlish Roger and his narrow-minded wife.

Rebecca had, by this time, worked herself up

into the belief that the events which she guessed to be taking place in the lonely field, half a mile distant, were likely to exercise an important influence over her destiny. It was a considerable disappointment when the carriage stopped at the door, and she found that very little beyond trouble and expence was to accrue to her in consequence.

Her husband thought differently. Baron Yermaloff's ghastly paleness—the death-like insensibility in which he was plunged, gave him a very sinister impression of his condition. Derwent, he firmly believed, had made himself amenable to the laws of his country. In one way or other, the unwonted presentiments which had haunted his mind all morning, were about to be realised. The wheel of fortune was turning, and he cared little by what steps he mounted, so that it was above his foe.

To his wife's surprise, he bade the party welcome, roughly but not uncivilly, telling her to do all she could to make the wounded gentleman

comfortable. She was to spare no trouble. Mrs. Derwent's feather-beds were called into requisition, and for once the long disused, best room at Languard was put to a hospitable purpose.

The foreigner who had accompanied the Baron did not recognise the sullen clod-hopping clown they had seen in the lane. Roger was quite metamorphosed. He was in excellent temper. He could not indeed be otherwise than rough, but they thought him an honest rustic; and Rebecca's sour curds and buttermilk were welcome as nectar and ambrosia to the fevered palate of the invalid, when he at last recovered from his swoon. The inflammation of his wound was not likely to be aggravated by the diet prescribed and rigidly enforced by the mistress of Languard.

It was impossible to remove him. Under whatever shelter had been first accorded to him, there, according to the surgeon's decree, he must remain. Rebecca was surprised at Roger's patient submission to such a prolongation of the troublesome duties imposed upon them. She

did not know with what intense satisfaction he was awaiting the issue of an event, which, he felt certain, as he watched the ominous shadows deepen in Yermaloff's sunken countenance, would bring on the ruin of the man he hated.



## CHAPTER VI.

A week passed away, drearily enough, and still the wounded man lay sick, almost unto death, in Roger Pemberton's house. Rebecca watched over him vigilantly, diluting his broth and tisane, and noticing, with looks as sour as her own curds and whey, that, on the spare diet furnished him, her patient was at length beginning to show some faint signs of amendment. She thought that her husband would soon become tired of the performance of such an unusual office as that of the good Samaritan ; but no word of the kind issued from his thick and firmly-compressed lips. Perhaps, the bitter hatred against his antagonist which Yermaloff expressed in his delirium, and more faintly but not less intensely as the fever left him, constituted a bond of fellowship between the

surly proprietor of Languard and his invalid guest.

Sir Frederick Derwent had, with great difficulty, been persuaded to keep out of the way, during the first few days which followed the duel. The report of the surgeon had been to the last degree unfavourable. Very little hope was entertained of the Baron's recovery ; and Sir Frederick was advised to avoid the inconvenience of being arrested, until the consequences of his rash act were known. His state of mind was described by those who had seen him as extraordinarily painful ; and the suspense endured by his friends and family was hardly less overwhelming.

Colonel Mac Alpine had, in the hurry of the moment, recollected that one of the East India Company's vessels, of which his brother was in command, was waiting for a change of wind at a neighbouring port. His hasty suggestion that Sir Frederick should go on board, and there await the tidings of the issue of the combat, which he promised to bring him without delay, was reluct-

antly adopted. Scarcely conscious of what was passing round him, in the overwhelming sense of self-reproach which assailed him, for having, by his rash act, endangered the life of a fellow-creature, Sir Frederick cared too little for his own safety to have taken the measures requisite for ensuring it, had not the importunities of his friends prevailed over his wish to give himself up immediately, to meet the consequences of his crime.

This stroke of adverse fortune, it was said, had dreadfully depressed the usually light-hearted master of Maydwell. He had entertained a presentiment, on leaving his house, that he should not return to it. The old servants had shared this impression—Laura and Clarice were full of nameless apprehensions. No one, indeed, had anticipated the exact turn which the late events had taken ; but every one seemed prepared for an unfavourable result.

No person held this conviction more firmly than Roger Pemberton. From the moment

when he had seen Sir Frederick's face, on the morning of the duel, he had felt certain that misfortune was in store for him. Even when Yermaloff showed signs of recovery, Roger still continued sanguine that, in some mysterious way, Sir Frederick's banishment from his home was destined to be a lasting one.

Meanwhile, the wind blew more drearily than ever round the exposed gables of the house on the hill. It freshened into a violent storm, on the fourth evening after the duel ; and disastrous tidings came in of the fate of the shipping on the coast. It was at this period that Yermaloff was at the worst. A report was even circulated through the neighbourhood,—none knew by whom originated, but growing, as such rumours are apt to do, from bad to worse,—that, in the midst of the heavy storm on Friday night, when all the inmates of the building were up, and alarm was entertained for the stability of the walls which had braved so many tempests, the Croatian nobleman had breathed his last.

There were people malicious enough to say that this report was set on foot by Roger Pemberton himself, on purpose to disturb the minds of Sir Frederick Derwent and his friends. Others again declared that the sick man was in reality dead, and that, for hidden reasons, Roger and Rebecca were concealing the fact. They were so universally detested, that nothing was considered too bad to be said and credited respecting them.

In the midst of these rumours and exaggerated suspicions, it was discovered, to the surprise of all, when communication was restored between the shipping and the shore, that the vessel in which Sir Frederick Derwent had embarked, had put out to sea. It was supposed that hearing the account of Yermaloff's death, his friends had prevailed upon him not to miss the opportunity of leaving England. Captain Mac Alpine would doubtless favour his landing at one of the ports of Normandy or Brittany, and, from thence, in a short time, tidings would reach Maydwell of his purposes and destination.

The equinoctial gales blew with unusual violence. Every gust shook the old house on the hill; and, even in the valley, the trees in Maydwell Park were blown down, and a scene of most unusual havoc and desolation presented itself to the eye, Laura's heart sank within her. All the despondency to which, since the loss of her parents, she had been subject, returned with double force; and her friend had scarcely the spirit left to comfort her.

No letter came from Sir Frederick. They did not know whither to transmit the tidings which at length reached them, that the Baron's condition was mending. All they could do was to write to the different ports at which the vessel might be expected to touch;—and to hope, against a dull dreary foreboding each felt at her heart, that, ultimately, all would end well.

No one liked to be the first to communicate to the young girls, thus suddenly and strangely deserted by their hitherto kind protector, a report that some direful catastrophe had taken place.

For several days, the intelligence obtained was vague; but, afterwards, more authentic information appeared in the papers, that the ill-fated vessel in which Sir Frederick had taken his passage, with fire sweeping its decks, and mountainous billows engulfing those of its heroic crew who sought to man the boats, had gone down at sea.

By miraculous exertions, the long-boat had been launched, and kept above water, until its occupants succeeded in getting clear of the burning mass, and hoisting a sail. They were still in sight of the ship, when, with a terrible explosion, she blew up,—threw a column of fire and sparks against the stormy sky, and then sank into the depths of the troubled main. No boat, except their own, was visible, moving on the waters, they averred, when they left the dreary scene. A few hours afterwards, they were taken in tow by a passing vessel, and reached the nearest haven; one on the French coast, to which the bark that afforded them assistance belonged. Thence, the few survivors of the wreck, after meeting

with every description of kindness, were transported back to England.

The sick man was fancying all sorts of strange shapes on the tarnished hangings of tapestry, in the best chamber at Languard, and wishing that the night were over. There was something peculiarly dismal in the way wherein the wind rushed down the wide chimney, at every gust threatening to extinguish the rushlight, which was casting its perplexingly-repeated circles of light and dark alternately, through its pierced tin shade, on the floor of the apartment. Roger Pemberton had been absent all day. A fair was to be held at Fordington, where he had gone to purchase cattle. Yermaloff had been left to the tender mercies of Rebecca, and was wearily counting the hours. When she looked in, he asked her whether her husband had returned. The night was so dark, she said, a man might almost lose his way between Fordington-street and Languard. Roger seldom stopped out so



late. He was not a man who ever cared for drink, or she should feel alarmed about him.

For once in the way, Rebecca, in spite of this assertion, seemed a prey to some of the timid weaknesses of her sex. She looked tired and harassed. Not having the strong conviction which Roger entertained, that they were to derive benefit from the train of events that had brought the wounded nobleman under their roof, she was wearying of his sojourn there, particularly as the trouble of nursing him fell to her share. Nevertheless, it is in the nature of a woman to feel some interest in the sick and feeble ; and Yermaloff was lavish in his protestations of gratitude. Even Rebecca was not quite proof against flattery ; and the foreigner bestowed it liberally upon her.

She moved the rushlight out of the draught, and stuck her scissors between the window-frame and the wall, to prevent the panes from rattling. Every now and then, a loud crash came against the glass, as if cart-loads of stones were discharged upon it. This was the hail, Rebecca

said. Several windows had been broken by it. Lumps of ice were pelting down the chimney, hard and sharp, and lay unmelted on the hearth.

Yermaloff shivered, as he lay in his bed, and drew the coverings round him. There was no fire in the grate. Rebecca asserted stoutly that if one were lighted, the flames and cinders would be blown into the middle of the room. Besides this, she considered that her patient was still feverish ; and she went on with the low diet and cooling treatment which had hitherto answered. When he was well enough to take nourishing things, she could see no reason why he should not be removed. The woman shrewdly suspected that, largely as he talked, the Baron was not likely to think of making them an adequate remuneration for their services.

Just then, the door opened, and Roger Pemberton entered. He did not seem afraid of disturbing the sick man ; and Yermaloff's eyes, widely opened, were fixed upon him, as he crossed the floor. There was a strange look of fierce

exultation in his face ; and the Baron felt half afraid of his savage host. He saw, too, at a glance, that the man had been drinking.

This was, as his wife had said, a very unusual occurrence. Roger was such a niggard, and the sour cyder so untempting, that he never exceeded the bounds of temperance. But, at this moment, he was under the influence of powerful excitement. His step was steady, though his face was flushed ; and his voice, when he spoke, was singularly firm and strong.

“ There is news in Forrington, to-day ! I stopped for the afternoon’s post, that there might be no mistake about it, before I brought it to you. You may pack up your traps, Dame, as soon as you like, for, depend on it, we’ll not be here long. Give me your hand, Sir ! You are the first person who has treated me like a gentleman, and shall be the first to congratulate my good woman and me on our luck.”

He paused for an instant ; his features, hard as they were, working with strong emotion.

Yermaloff started up in his bed, and supported himself on his elbow.

“ You might hear the tolling of the bell, if the wind did not blow the contrary way,” Roger said. “ All the shutters up street were shut, after the mail came in from the west, and people sitting half-a-dozen together, in front of the post-office, while the man read out the papers. The Ellenborough, Commander Mac Alpine, has gone down on fire at sea ; and Derwent’s name is not among those of the few saved from the wreck.”

Both of his auditors shuddered. Perhaps, even Roger, if not half maddened by drink and the long indulgence of his vindictive passions, would have assumed some semblance of decent gravity, as he told his tale. But he had brooded over the idea of Derwent’s death, until it became familiar to him, and he little cared by what means it was brought about.

The figures on the tapestry assumed yet more ghastly shapes, and the shadows and flickering

lights on the floor danced before the eyes of the sick, half-fainting man.

“ Had the news come any other way,” Roger said, not noticing his agitation, “ folks would have been loth to believe it. We should have had to wait for months before taking possession of our own. But no one in his senses can doubt it. I read the names myself, and there’s not more than a dozen of them. Every other soul went down with the vessel ; and there was not a speck on the water, when the boat got off.”

“ Come to bed, man ! ” said his wife, who saw that a painful impression was being made on the foreigner. “ This is a shocking story, and I am not sure that you are quite yourself to-night, so as to know what you’re telling us. Oh, Roger ! I never saw you the worse for drink before.”

“ I could have drained the sea, wench ! ” the man said, fiercely. “ Such a thirst has been upon me that I spent every penny I had in my pocket, to gratify it. Besides, the men I bar-

gained with for the sheep insisted on wishing me luck. But never mind! I tell you, I have said no word that is not true. As sure as fate, Derwent is dead! drowned in the deep sea, with many a better man than himself;—and the fellows tolling the death-bell for him will, if I scatter my money about, like a fool and a gentleman, ring a peal merrily enough to instal me into possession of Maydwell.”

Yermaloff had, by this time, recovered. His own dislike to Sir Frederick was scarcely less intense than that entertained by Roger; and, in many ways, he saw that this event would be to his advantage. He wrung the large coarse hand resting on the bed, as warmly as his weak state permitted.

“Be not precipitate, my good friend!” he said. “If this news is true,—and there seems no reason to doubt it,—you and my excellent nurse will be in your right places, and no one will rejoice at your good fortune more unfeignedly

than myself. Few persons have less reason to love this Sir Frederick Derwent than I have."

A sharp spasm of pain convulsed his thin features, and the perspiration broke out coldly on his forehead.

Rebecca advised him to lie still and try to sleep. She was sorry that Roger had spoken so plainly before him, and endeavoured to draw her husband away; but the Baron declared that he could not possibly close his eyes. Roger angrily told her to leave them; and the two men remained talking over what had happened, till morning dawned in the bleak, stormy sky.

## CHAPTER VII.

ROGER PEMBERTON followed Yermaloff's advice, and said no more, for the present, of his intentions. Even to his wife, his lips were closed. If any one were in possession of his confidence, it was the sick man. People thought that he might now have been removed; but, to everybody's surprise, no steps were taken for the purpose. Rebecca dared not propose it to her husband. She did not know what ideas were working in his mind; but he walked about the house and the farm, restless and apparently discontented, with his hands in his pockets, and in his most morose, churlish humour. If any one disturbed his meditations, he became absolutely savage.

He did not take the same pains as formerly to avoid trespassing on Sir Frederick's land. Once,



he was seen by Mr. Holcombe standing in the churchyard, looking in at the windows, as if at the tablet to his aunt's memory, on the wall of the chancel. On another occasion, for the first time since he had been resident at Maydwell Parsonage, the Rector encountered his surly neighbour in the village street. He appeared to be contemplating the improvements which Sir Frederick Derwent had lately made in the cottages. Mr. Holcombe, who was not on terms of acquaintanceship with this low-minded man, passed him by in silence without seeming to notice him. Roger stared rudely at the clergyman, but did not offer to speak.

No reasonable hope could be entertained that the tidings respecting the fate of the Ellenborough were untrue; yet Laura persisted in disbelieving them. Even when sorrowfully convinced that the vessel and most of her crew were lost, she was still persuaded that Sir Frederick must be among the survivors. Weeks passed away, however, without its appearing that any

other boat than the one already mentioned, had survived the storm in which the Ellenborough had gone down. The shore was strewn with pieces of the wreck which had drifted before the wind. Subscriptions were made for the widows and children of the seamen; and then public curiosity and interest began to die away.

It had been thought necessary to examine the contents of Sir Frederick's desk, particularly the papers which Dixon had seen him place there, on the morning of the duel. A note which lay uppermost, for Mr. Holcombe, authorised his doing so. Underneath this was the Baronet's will, in which the Rector and Mr. Bingley were nominated as his executors. All the directions it contained were straightforward and liberal. His creditors were to be satisfied first, legacies were bequeathed to the old servants, and whatever remained of his property, of which it was in his power to dispose, was left to Laura. His niece wept unrestrainedly, when she was told of the great consideration shown to her. She still positively

refused to believe him to be dead, and would not act upon the testamentary dispositions made in her favour.

All Sir Frederick's friends, as well as his domestics, were inclined to wait, at all events, for a year, before giving up the hope of his return. Roger Pemberton was less delicate. He said, with some truth, that, under the most favourable supposition,—imagining what there was no ground for admitting, that another boat had escaped the storm,—the seas were as a highway, with ships constantly passing. Some intelligence by letter would, before this time, have reached his family, if Sir Frederick were still alive.

Clarice's usual buoyant spirits had altogether deserted her. She entertained the deeply painful impression that it was through her fault that Sir Frederick was lost to his friends. To her blameable concealment of her real position, she attributed his quarrel with Yermaloff, whose journey to England had been in pursuit of her. From the moment of her accidental meeting with

the Baron in the plantations, she was aware that Sir Frederick had been under the influence of complete misconception and jealousy.

She did not acquaint Laura with what had passed between them, the instant before her father-in-law's entrance; but she felt that she would give the world to have shown more self-possession. One word of kindness would have soothed his ruffled temper, and prevented his giving way to the anger and impatience which the foreign nobleman's apparently unwarrantable behaviour had excited. She hated herself for her ungraciousness, and wept incessantly, now that it was too late to repair the error. Sir Frederick, irritated by her ill-judged avoidance, had not sought to see her again; and she was sorrowfully convinced that all the grief expressed by every countenance around her, the desolation of the place, as well as her own peculiar wretchedness, was to be traced to her past inconsiderate conduct.

Yermaloff had obtained all the authority with

which her weakminded mother could furnish him, to oblige her to return with him to the continent. His wife was the guardian of her daughter's person, until she came of age; and, though Clarice saw many things in her mother's letters which gave her the idea that they were written under compulsion, it greatly pained her to disobey her only surviving parent.

She would perhaps have felt more scruples on this account, had not the news of the duel and results been the means of bringing Count Czekeli into the neighbourhood. Already, more than once, he had contrived to way-lay her in her walks, and, in defiance of her unconcealed aversion, pressed his unwelcome suit upon her. Clarice had great difficulty in avoiding him, for the foreigners crossed the park at Maydwell constantly, on their way to the farm; and it was only by secluding themselves entirely, that Laura and herself could escape meeting Roger and his obnoxious visitors.

The Hungarian nobleman made a merit of his discretion in having kept her secret all the winter as faithfully as her favourite Fedor ; and urged more vehemently than ever the claims which he considered that his persevering attachment gave him upon her favour. She knew him to be capable of any wild action, and shrank from the vague threats which lurked beneath his protestations of devoted love. Steps and voices at night in the shrubberies under her window had often lately terrified her. Markham said that the bad characters in the village were getting a-head again ; and that a wicked spirit was aroused by the foreigners' servants being always drinking at the ale-houses, and lounging about the street.

Both Clarice and Laura began to feel their position to be alarmingly unprotected. They now fully understood Sir Frederick's dislike to the close neighbourhood of the farmer at Languard. The place seemed nearer to Maydwell than it had ever done before. They could not look that way

without seeing the dark gables on the hill top, frowning down upon the defenceless mansion in the valley.

At this time, it first became currently reported, that Roger Pemberton, who was known to be Sir Frederick Derwent's heir, meditated taking possession of Maydwell. A perfect storm of indignation arose at the idea. No one could believe that he would be inhuman enough to disturb the family in their first deep grief, and while Laura still persisted in her incredulity.

The servants shrank from apprising Miss Derwent of this painful rumour. Even Mr. Holcombe, when applied to as the person best qualified to undertake the task, could scarcely nerve himself to mention what, more than anything else, was calculated to confirm the reality of a fact which all would, if possible, have disputed. He had been very low-spirited, since the news of the loss of the vessel; reproaching himself for some of the previous circumstances, and wishing, with all his heart, that rascally foreigner had never set foot

beneath his roof. He also remembered Derwent's anxiety to arrange his affairs, and believed that his poor friend, at that time, felt himself to be a doomed man.

Penelope had gone into almost widow's mourning for the Baronet. Not a smile was to be seen on her face, and she kept the cheek he had saluted sacred from her nearest relations. Even her brother had never since been permitted to kiss her.

Lady Fortescue was a woman of spirit, and took up the matter differently. She was disposed to be at the expense of fitting out an armament, if necessary, to go in quest of Sir Frederick; and would not give way to despondency.

The old servants at the Place were not less energetic than the lion-hearted widow. Dixon had great faith in the success of an advertisement, which she and Reynolds caused to be inserted in the county paper, as well as in the London journals. It described their master to the life, and, if he were in existence, the housekeeper felt convinced that, humanly speaking, this was the



best means of recovering him. If he were in a civilised country, Sir Frederick, she was certain, would read the newspapers ; and his kind heart must sympathise with the deep distress into which his unaccountable absence had plunged his family.

All the subordinate members of the household asked leave to furnish their quota to the expense, in order that this touching appeal might be inserted frequently ; and the butler and house-keeper continued extremely sanguine concerning the ultimate result of the measure.

Yermaloff was now able to creep about the old house at Languard on crutches. He and Roger, strange to say, had become great friends. Even Rebecca was softened by the foreigner's insinuating address. Nothing was said of his leaving them. His friends came and went between Stanmore Park and the farm. Roger was forming a connection with the aristocracy.

This man's character was changing. He no longer cared about his land, nor hoarded every

penny. It was said that he drank hard with the young men who came about the house ; and that the keen excitement of gambling inflamed his passions. His great ambition, now, was to become a gentleman ;—to fling away his money like Derwent, and take his place among the best of them.

He was rather angry with Rebecca for still curing the bacon, getting up his Sunday shirts, and superintending the great wash. He wished her to become a lady ; though he was rather puzzled how to set about the metamorphosis. She was beginning to discard her worsted jackets, and to show a preference for rich silks and gaudy colours, instead of sticking to the plain, useful brown, and the thin cheap fabrics to which, hitherto, her ambition had been restricted. Yermaloff assured her that ruby red, emerald green, and sapphire blue suited her dark complexion. There was some hope of the woman yet. Rebecca was learning to think of her appearance in the eyes of her husband's dissipated associates.

Her desire to take possession of Maydwell almost equalled that of Roger. Languard was positively hateful to them. This hopeful couple grudged Laura every hour's occupation of her uncle's house. They were prepared, if she did not move willingly, to eject her. Every moment, the apprehension of those around her increased, that she might be subjected to some insult from encountering him on what he now considered as his own ground.

This would have happened already had not Roger, in reality, been more afraid than he chose to confess, of the fragile creature he was persecuting. He could bully Mr. Holcombe and even Mr. Bingley; beard the old coachman and the saucy grooms in the stable, swearing loudly enough at them to be heard at the mansion;—examining the horses and carriages, and expressing his determination to take everything as it stood,—drive the same equipage and keep the same establishment with his predecessor;—but when it came to talking to Miss Derwent, the

snail shrank back into its shell. He did not exactly know how he should set about it.

He invaded the basement story of the mansion on one occasion ; and insulted Dixon by telling her that he meant to retain her and Reynolds in his service. Money was no object to him. He would give what wages they liked. He was a richer man than their late master. The faithful servants said that, at present, they knew no master but Sir Frederick, and, in his absence, obeyed Miss Derwent's orders.

He scowled at them savagely, but, on their asking whether he wished them to mention his presence there to their mistress, he retreated. Every day, however, his arrogance increased. His dread of her gentle refinement was wearing off, and his impatience to dislodge her from the house exceeded all bounds. His liberal offers astonished the trustees. He was willing to pay ready money for everything, so that he might enter into possession without delay.

By petty savings, he and Rebecca had become

rich. A large sum lay in his banker's hands, which he was ready to devote to the purpose of purchasing the furniture and personal property of Sir Frederick. It appeared as if he would have desired to enter the garden parlour, and hang up his hat in the hall as master, without the slightest change ;—as though he thought that, by handling the cricket-bats and looking at the old pictures, he would become a fit successor to the liberal, frank-hearted Derwents.

The old butler had seen him standing in the shrubberies, looking in at his master's window, which was fast closed and the garden-door locked. All the servants hated and were in league against him : but there was no contesting the point that he was Sir Frederick's lawful heir, and the man was determined, by fair means or foul, to make good his claim.

Thoroughly disgusted with him, Mr. Holcombe felt inclined to throw up a trust which would bring him into contact with such odious brutality.

With Sir Frederick, he was in the habit of saying, his interest in the Derwents had expired. Laura and he had never been cordial. Even now, he considered that she showed a preference for Mr. Bingley ; and he was much annoyed at being associated with him in the management of his friend's affairs.

The only point on which Sir Frederick's executors appeared inclined to agree, was respecting the necessity for Miss Derwent's leaving Maydwell. Mr. Holcombe and Mr. Bingley both thought that there was no possibility of guessing what ungentlemanly action Roger Pemberton might commit. They had not made the slightest impression upon him by their remonstrances, during the interview which followed his announcement that he meant to take possession of the property. Already he had given the young lady full time, he declared, to make her arrangements, and quit the premises. His Missus and he had been put to great inconvenience, and could bide

her pleasure no longer. All the fine-lady airs in Christendom should not keep Rebecca Pemberton, another week, out of her own drawing room.

The news of Roger's hostile intentions, though cautiously broken to her by Mr. Bingley, came upon the poor orphan girl like a thunder-clap.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE brook that ran through the grounds of Maydwell Place, and past the cottages at Wood End, went singing on its way. The water-cresses were just in perfection; and the wallflowers in the widow's garden scented the whole field, when Lewis Pemberton crossed it with slow steps, as he pursued one of the well-known footpaths to Languard.

He was about to break through his resolution of not visiting the old house and its ungracious inmates again. The sooner his unwelcome task was over, the better. He felt that the longer he delayed, the less heart he had to set about it. Yet, the nearer he approached the farm, the slower became his pace.

He did not go in by the garden-door, but,



skirting the walled precincts where, in spite of his domestic trials, he had spent many happy hours, went round to the porch, where his father and mother used to sit in the summer evenings, looking at the few passengers along the lane, and the cattle coming in from their pastures. It was empty now. From within the house, however, proceeded sounds of unaccustomed festivity. Lewis heard his brother's voice loud above the rest. Roger was making merry with his new friends before, quitting the farm. The best of Rebecca's stores graced the board; and wine and spirits were abundantly provided.

Lewis did not enter. He sent in word by Josh, who was attending to the strangers' horses in the yard, that he wished to speak to his brother; and waited for him on the threshold. A more civil message than he expected made him alter his intention. He could not well say to Roger what was on his mind, in the open air, within hearing of the idlers in the farm-yard. Passing through the low-browed porch, he went

into the old oak-pannelled hall, where he had formerly dined and breakfasted with the family, but which was now deserted for what, in the old people's time, had been called the parlour.

Roger did not keep him waiting long. He had always stood somewhat in awe of his grave gentleman-like brother; and there were moments when he felt lonely, surrounded as he was by time-serving friends and openly-avowed enemies. Besides this, he was aiming at placing himself in the station to which Lewis confessedly belonged. It would grace his triumph to have him at his table. Angry as he had been with his brother, if the young clergyman would cringe to him now, he had a better chance than he had ever had in his life, of the next presentation to the living of Maydwell.

"Come in, Lewis!" he said, with a surly affectation of hospitality. "Better late than never. There's meat and drink enough for twenty men like thee; and I don't grudge it;—no, nor I don't bear malice neither. It's hearty of you to

come down and wish me luck. I'll make the woman civil;—never fear!—Sit down with me and my friends to dinner.' We'll talk of this business that has brought thee here, afterwards."

Rude and unpolished as it was, his brother's manner of welcoming him made Lewis feel, as he had often done before, regret that they had parted in anger. The touch of cordiality in his tone affected him. He shook hands with Roger; though he did not accept his invitation to join his guests in the inner room.

"Our business must be settled first, Roger:" he said, decidedly. "If you tell me that I have travelled so far, misled by a false report, I am quite ready to forget the past, and meet you as a brother. But you must assure me, before I do this, that there is no truth in the rumour which has reached me, even in London, of this part of the country being in a state of excitement, on account of your intending to take possession of Maydwell Place, while the fact of Sir Frederick's death is still a matter of uncertainty."

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“ Who doubts it ? ” said Roger. “ No one in his senses, that I know of. You yourself, Lewis, must see that the man would have come home or written, if he were above ground, sooner than give me the chance of standing, even for a day, in his house as master. Come, Lewis, you know well that Derwent is dead ! I see it in your countenance.”

The young clergyman certainly evinced deep concern. Like all the rest of Sir Frederick’s friends, he had been greatly affected by the calamity which had befallen the kind-hearted Baronet. “ If it be so, Roger,” he answered, “ there is the less need for this unseemly haste. Sooner or later, should these disastrous tidings be confirmed, no one will deny your right to succeed to Sir Frederick’s estate. Wait, I entreat you, till the year has gone by, or till the doubts still existing in men’s minds are removed. Do not risk being driven with opprobrium from a station you may be said to have usurped ; and whence,

under any circumstances, it would not be agreeable to have to descend, and take a lower place."

"I will not wait an hour!" said Roger, with an oath. "Why, if I thought there was any doubt about the matter, Lewis, I tell you, I would make the more haste. It would be worth ten years of life to be master of Maydwell for a day, and see how those fat servants, the bullying coachman and vixenish housekeeper, would like my ways. But it's all nonsense. Derwent will never come back. The best thing you can do is to sit down with us, and drink my dame's health to make peace, before we all leave this crazy old roof-tree together."

He looked round, with positive disgust, at the venerable but homely residence of his forefathers. The great storm had done considerable damage; and Lewis noticed that the walls, where the rain had come in, were still damp and discoloured, as if no attempt had lately been made to keep the building weather-tight. The place looked more

comfortless than ever. It was quite plain that Roger had had the thought of leaving it in his mind for months.

“ I am sorry to see you in this humour, Roger :” his brother said, gravely. “ Men have been known to return to their families, after all hope of their having escaped from shipwreck had died away. What will become of you, if, when you have changed the frugal habits of a life, it should prove that, (as his friends still confidently expect), Sir Frederick Derwent and another boat’s crew have survived the loss of the *Ellenborough* ; and, after being cast upon some distant coast, are now working their way slowly back to England ?”

A very dark frown contracted the muscles of Roger’s forehead. “ That is just like thee, Lewis ! I have not heard such an unpleasant idea started, this month past. It needed one’s own brother to come to the door to broach it. But, no matter ! I don’t want to quarrel with thee ; and whatever brought thee hither I am willing to believe was meant kindly.”

He stared at his brother, and then looked moodily down on the ground. Lewis replied very earnestly.

“My errand here, Roger, was certainly meant to be one of kindness. I should have been glad to find you better disposed to listen to me. It seems to me shocking to be building upon the foundation of another man’s ruin, and upon the bitter regret of his connections, the fabric of our own fortunes. I hear people, whom you call your friends, noisily congratulating you on circumstances which, if you cannot grieve about them, should be treated with decent gravity and respect. You cannot surely cherish ill-will against your former neighbour, now?”

Roger’s heavy features visibly lighted up ; but he did not raise his eyes to his brother’s face, when Lewis, with a strong emphasis on the last word, paused for an answer.

“No,” he said. “Let him rest,—if he *is* dead. Just now, you seemed to doubt it. I don’t believe any one hereabouts thinks that he is alive.

Why do you stir me up by talking as if you had heard anything fresh, when I want to be civil and agreeable to you, if you would let me?"

He stopped for a minute and then went on more fluently.

"You know well enough, Lewis, that I have never had your smooth way of speaking, nor the gift of making friends, though some that I did not count upon have taken part with me. You should not be so ready to believe every evil word against your own mother's son; but leave bygones to be bygones, and stand up for him. For my part, I am willing to say that I am sorry Rebecca did not make things more comfortable. We live differently now, and her temper has not so much to rough it. I'll be bound, we'll suit you capitally, if you like to take up with us again."

Lewis was surprised at his brother's concession. He did not know the great change which had occurred in all Roger's ideas; nor understand of how much advantage it would be to a man who



had hitherto disregarded all considerations of station and respectability, that he of whom all the county spoke well should support him.

“My lot is differently cast, Roger:” he answered. “I thank you for your offer; but, at present, I have occupations which, to be properly fulfilled, must be carried on in solitude, where I can have my books and papers round me, and my studious habits will not interfere with the comfort of others. Do not mistake me, nor imagine that I bear ill-will towards your wife or yourself. The comforts of which you speak are matters of indifference to me. I should miss the old rooms and walled garden sorely, if I came to visit you at any other place than Languard. But I trust you will change your intention of leaving the farm.”

“Why, Lewis, this is carrying the joke rather too far!” said Roger, with some difficulty controlling his ill-humour, “Do you really suppose, after the way Derwent and his set have always had of treating me, that I am likely to show such

vast consideration for his memory, as to live in this tumble-down barn of a place, when the fine house in the valley is my own? I can't think what puts such ridiculous ideas into your head; nor why, with all your talk about fine feelings, you never have a spark of them for your nearest of kin. Come, man!—blood's thicker than water. Don't you see that the only sure policy is to carry it through with a firm hand, and hold together?—This ferment that you take fright at will go down. It's nothing but froth. Just let people see the Pembertons at the Hall, and, mayhap, at the Parsonage, again; and I'll wager more pounds than you get by writing, we'll have it all our own way at Maydwell and Forrington!"

His coarse, vindictive tone of exultation was revolting to his brother.

"I have nothing more to urge then:"—he answered, rising. We can hold no farther communication together, while you act in a manner which I so utterly condemn. As you seem to value popularity more than you once did, why

cast away your only chance of obtaining it? Do you not perceive that you are outraging the feelings of every gentleman in the county, by your conduct towards Miss Derwent?"

"I thought it would come out that she was at bottom of all this heat! I wish thee would be honest, Lewis, and not beat about the bush!" exclaimed Roger, sneeringly. "What a blind fellow you must be, not to see that you would have ten times over a better chance with the girl you had a fancy for, if you were on good terms with me, and the Pembertons in their old places, than slaving thyself to death in some London office. But go your way! Depend upon it, I shall take mine, and it's the straightest of the two. I don't care if I spend every farthing I have by me,—and it's more than people think for,—in making good my rights. If thee was to talk thyself blind, it would not make the shadow of a difference. Wilt be among my friends who are wishing me joy; and, for once, act like a brother; or take

part with my enemies? There's plenty of 'em to keep thee company."

He spoke very bitterly, and a feeling of compassion entered Lewis's mind. The man seemed to him, in his fancied pride and prosperity, to be standing alone, on the very verge of destruction. He had always reproached himself for having, on a former occasion, given way to angry passions, and he now went nearer to his brother.

"Think this matter over again, Roger. I do not ask you to give up any real, tangible possession. But this tinsel greatness—this idle wish to rise above the station with which hitherto you have been content, is unlike all that I have ever known of you. A year hence, or sooner, your claims will be honourably recognised. If you make this sacrifice,—if you respect the feelings of the Derwents,—I am your brother, and will promise to stand by you."

At that moment, the party in the dining-room broke up, and some of Roger's friends passed

through the hall, on the way to the stables to get their horses.

The sight of his associates gave the master of the house courage. None of them were acquainted with Lewis, and the travel-stained, grave-featured stranger did not awe them. Lewis let them pass by, without appearing to notice their somewhat uncivil bearing towards himself, or the free speeches exchanged between them and their host. The next carouse was to be held at Maydwell.

“I tell thee, Lewis, thee mightest as soon bring the dead to life again, and my father and mother out of their graves, as keep me out of possession of my own house more than a day longer !” Roger said fiercely. “If thee hadst come, as I thought, for once in thy life, with an honest heart and a stretched-out hand, like others that were strangers to me, six months ago ; and said, ‘Old fellow ! let’s wipe off past scores, and run up a fresh account :’ I’d have been the first to meet thee half-way ; and, perhaps, done more for you than your

fine friends have ever thought of, But that's all over. I won't have any ally of Derwent's, open or secret, skulking about my house ;—so the less we see of each other, the better. I have made up my mind, and so has the Missus, to sleep at Maydwell to-morrow night. You may tell your friend Mr. Bingley to advise Miss Derwent to make room for us quietly. I can't tell what I may do, if the girl is obstinate. I have given her fair notice to quit ; and she may bring an action, if she likes, against me, if she is not pleased with the next steps I take. He and she had best not provoke me. There's an end of the matter."

He turned short off on his heel, and went back to his wife, who had not so entirely got rid of the habits of a life-time as not to be putting aside the remains of the feast. The ill-favoured man from the cottage in the lane held the gate of the farm-yard open for Lewis, after the horsemen had gone through. His countenance now bore the marks of habitual intemperance ; and he answered

with a sullen air the questions put to him about his family. The dog Fox, which was still close at his heels, showed better manners than his surly master, and recognised Lewis with evident pleasure.

Occupied as his mind was, when he left his brother's dwelling, the young clergyman could not pass the poor cottage of the widow Farleigh, without stopping to speak to her. She had come to the corner of the fence, when she perceived him approaching, and was full of wonder and delight at seeing him.

"Be you come whoam?" she said. "Do ye come in and rest yourself. I haven't seen such a pleasant face for a long time. Mr. Roger be a going backwards and forards often; but he looks as black as thunder most days. Mayhap he'll feel himself better when he takes his family down to the Place. It's a loo spot, and the hill-top catches the wind sadly."

She curtseyed lower than ever, and scrutinised Lewis's troubled features, as he recognised in her

changed mode of speaking of Roger a sure sign of the times.

“Folks be main sorry for the young ladies, hereabouts,” she continued. “I don’t mind when I seed them last, pretty creatures! They be right down scared with the foreign gentlemen, and no wonder; for they make nothing of crossing the brook, and going close under the windows. Mr. Markham, the keeper, threatened to take them up for poaching, the next time he caught them idling with their fishing-rods by the water; but, then, if so be that the manor is Mr. Pember-ton’s, why who should profit by it, but them that’s spending so much of their time at the Farm? You see, Sir, that’s just it. No one rightly knows who is to give orders, or whom we are to look to. Miss Derwent is a sweet lady; I’d be the last to say a word against her. Many’s the good gown-piece and the pound of tea she has given me; but it be mortal hard to please two masters, and we be all brought up to know that, if anything happened to Sir Frederick, who was always ven-



turesome, Mr. Pemberton would take his place down to Maydwell."

The old dame dropped another curtsy. "That's where it is, you see. 'There be'ant no help for it, as I'm told; and it's but natural the gentleman that's coming in should want to have the place to himself, and his own friends about him. Mr. Pemberton has got a wild set up there, and my neighbour be a telling I, that the French Count that has been stopping so long to Languard, be soon going away with the dark young lady; and that Mr. Roger wouldn't object to their taking Miss Derwent along with them. I'd be loth to see harm come to her, but then I wouldn't wish to do anything to get out of favour with master. He was always a hard man to deal with. Folks are beginning to feel there's different times coming to when the old master let them do pretty much as they liked. Howsomever, we must try the best we can to please him, and do our duty by our superiors, and see what comes of it. Madam Derwent, your aunt, Sir, isn't

forgotten ; so the Pembertons don't be strangers. Many of us haven't seen such times since as when she lived at the Hall, and we most of us expected,—as who knows mayn't come to pass yet?—to see your honour settled at the Rectory."

"That is among the anticipations which are never likely to be realised," said Lewis. "My brother would not offer,—neither, under existing circumstances, should I accept the position,—if Mr. Holcombe's place were vacant to-morrow."

"To be sure, Sir,—your honour knows best," she said, looking perplexed. "But oh Sir, Mr. Lewis,—do'e, now, speak to your brother about keeping bad company! It's been the ruin of Josh; and now that poor Maggie's head be laid in the churchyard, it grieves me to see the babes neglected. He be up to Languard night and day, for there's more to be done since they've often gentlemen stopping there; and my neighbour knows more than he ought about the fishing. It's rare times, he says, but never a penny does he bring home to the childer, of all the foreign

gentlemen give him. The poor little maid that has done her best to look after him and her brothers, is going fast after her mother, and hasn't a frock decent for Sundays. But it's half mad with drink the man is ; and I do hear that the beer and the cyder runs faster at Languard now, than the ale did in Maydwell kitchen. It's awful the waste that goes on ; and Madam Pemberton that used to be so scrimping, bade me save all the honey for her the bees made to-year, and send it down, as I'd been used to do, to the family at the Place. I know how to speak to such as she be,—begging your pardon, Sir ; and when I called her my lady, she looked pleased, and said she'd speak to master about my being kept on to weed the shrubbery walks. 'Tan't that she be my lady ; but then she likes it, and there's no harm done. You see, she be the mistress ; and 'tis best to let her see we knows it."

Lewis had waited to hear the widow's remarks about the man who lived near her, in hopes of being of service to his family. He now recalled

her to the subject from which she had wandered.

“He do be taking the Lord’s name in vain, and beating the children, as he did his poor wife, to death,” she said angrily. “I’ve seen them gentlefolks about the cottage, and heard them talk freer than they should do about the young ladies. If they’ve got any mischief in their heads, Josh is just the man to help them. He’d sell his soul for drink, since the woman that kept him a bit straight is gone to her reckoning, I do miss Maggie, poor soul, when the baking is about. Most times I’d make a cake for she, and the children ran in for it; but now they’ve so many troubles that they sit cowering over the fire, like wizened-up men and women, and scarce gets out of the way, when father comes in and bastes them.”

“You are sorely missed in the cottages, Mr. Lewis,” she observed, following him to the door, after gratefully receiving his gifts for herself and the neglected children. “Since this trouble fell

upon the good ladies at the Hall, Mrs. Dixon has it mostly her own way again, and the poor have been left to shift for themselves. It's little I or any of the old set have to be thankful to her for. Perhaps Mr. Pemberton might like to have some of his aunt's people about him, as there are so many that are strangers to him ; and Madam Derwent, in her way, was as good a woman as ever lived. I mind her never letting St. Thomas's Day go by without giving a shilling to every one of us that worked for her ; and, if there was a hard word with it sometimes, it was soon forgotten. We'll perhaps be better off than we expect, when your brother and his lady are settled at the Place, and the servants haven't got so much the upper hand. Riches is a trial to some, but poverty comes hardest to others ; and when Mr. Pemberton has plenty of good cheer in the parlour, he may think of the poor widows and orphans that are living within sight of his kitchen chimneys."

## CHAPTER IX.

It was the loveliest season of all the year, at Maydwell. The rich fir-cones were swelling on the trees ;—the larch had put forth its tassels of bright green ;—the laburnums hung in showers of golden blossoms in the shrubberies. There were not so many flowers about the place, all the year round, as now, when the woods were carpeted with blue hyacinths and anemones ;—the gorse was out on the slopes of the downs, and the guelder-roses, lilacs and syringas gleamed through the scanty foliage.

Spring had come, at last, all blossom and fragrance. Everything looked fresh and green. The grass was springing in the park and in the meadows. The hills had lost the parched brown

look they had worn, during the preceding bleak, ungenial weather. Nature had put on her gayest robe, as if for the purpose of mocking the deep sorrow of those who were going forth from this peaceful Eden, leaving it a prey to the bad spirits who were to be suffered to profane its quiet precincts.

A report had reached Fordington that Roger Pemberton meant to take possession of the house on the evening of that day ; and Mr. Bingley had hastened over, at once, to prevent the possibility of its helpless young mistress being exposed to brutal insolence. Weeping more bitterly by far than she had done, when, for the first time, she timidly entered her uncle's house ;—with no one to give her courage, for Clarice had latterly been more depressed than herself,—Laura got into the carriage which her kind friend had ordered round to the door, and passed through the old lodge-gates, and under the lofty hedges of shining evergreen, with eyes so blinded by tears that she scarcely recognised one of the many

loving but sorrowful faces of the people drawn up in the road in lines, or standing in front of their cottages, to see the dear good young ladies taken away from them.

It was a sorrowful day in Maydwell parish. The little school which Laura had founded,—the alms-houses and cottages which Sir Frederick had commenced building,—were at a stand-still. Every late improvement, including the good understanding recently subsisting between landlord and tenant, was threatened with a blight more lasting than that which the east wind had brought upon its wings. The new man was so cordially detested by all the inhabitants of the place, that even a sense of their own interest could not check the groans and hisses, with which, as Rebecca Pemberton and Roger were descried, inside the Fordington fly, journeying on to take possession of the house and land, goods and chattels of their generous master, their progress through the village street was marked.

An intense feeling of dislike towards his new



tenantry sprang up in the mean churl's mind, as he saw that the men standing at the cottage doors went within, refusing to touch their hats. The clerk declared that the church bells could not be rung. Some accident had certainly hampered the ropes ;—only jarring discord could be produced. At Laura's request, the servants belonging to the Place had agreed to remain for a time ; but there was none of the cheerful alacrity in their bearing, now, which they were wont to evince upon the appearance of their master, even after a short absence.

It was Roger's interest at present to be civil to them. Rebecca, indeed, eyed Mrs. Dixon and her stiff silk gown askance ; but she took no liberties with her. Her husband had strictly commanded her to let Derwent's housekeeper have her own way, till she herself got used to the place. Money, he was constantly saying, was no object to them, and he would not be disgraced, now that he wished to live like a gentleman, by her thrifty habits. In answer to the housekeeper's enquiries,

he sternly directed that everything should go on as usual. He would dine at the same hour, and be waited upon in the same manner, as Sir Frederick Derwent.

The tears rushed into Dixon's eyes, at the mention of her master, for she could not yet acknowledge another. She did not answer, and, for the credit of the house, sent up a better dinner than any other consideration would have induced her to set before Roger and Rebecca, and their detested visitor. All the servants held Laura's opinion, and retained their places in the confident belief that Sir Frederick still survived; but they thought it the most intolerable of their calamities, that the foreigner who was the cause of their being for the present deprived of their kind master, should be giving orders in a dictatorial tone, and evidently assuming the upper hand, at Maydwell Place.

There was something very pleasant and inviting in the aspect of the little drawing-room, where Mrs. Bingley was anxiously awaiting her husband's

return, on the day when he had gone up to Maydwell to inform Laura of Roger Pemberton's intentions, and persuade her to return with him to Fordington. Their miniature dwelling was declared capable of marvellous enlargement for her accommodation. The children and pupils were disposed of in all sorts of strange nooks and crannies, and every arrangement made to reconcile Miss Derwent and Clarice to accepting their reiterated offers of hospitality.

The scent of sweet spring-flowers—of the English orange-blossom the syringa, the double wallflowers and hyacinths—came in through the open windows. The freshly-mown lawn and neatly-weeded walks, the delicately white muslin curtains, and fragrant vases of lilies on the table, showed how much pains had been taken to set off the place to advantage. Like the rest of Sir Frederick's intimate friends, Mrs. Bingley would not acknowledge that she had given up the expectation of seeing him again. She was not in black, but had cast off her dark winter apparel,

and striven to render her appearance as cheerful as that of her small but prettily-furnished sitting-room.

There were tears in her eyes, nevertheless, as she listened to every sound, and walked from window to window, sometimes speaking to the children playing in the garden; at others standing quite still, with her eyes fixed on the sea, which was sparkling in the sunshine, as that treacherous element will do, when spring breezes sport upon the blue waters, whatever desolation its angrier moods may have occasioned.

Presently, there was a stir among the children, a glad tone in their voices, such as frequently told her that their father had returned. If so, he was alone, and her preparations had been made in vain. Mrs. Bingley felt disappointed, and feared that Laura's determined incredulity would subject her to very serious inconvenience. The next moment, she saw that it was Lewis Pember-ton whom the children were so eager to welcome.

He did not stop with them, but came towards

her directly, with a very grave and anxious countenance. He felt almost ashamed of showing his face at Fordington, he said, colouring deeply, as he shook hands with her. As soon as he heard that his brother, with such disgraceful haste, was taking measures to disturb Sir Frederick's family and household, he had travelled down from London, in order, if possible, to prevent it.

Roger was quite impracticable. All his brother could say had served only to strengthen his determination. "Miss Derwent cannot remain at Maydwell,"—Lewis continued, earnestly. "If Bingley fails in persuading her, we will go there. I am sorry to say, my brother is not disposed to treat her with the consideration which the harassing uncertainty of her position ought to command. If Sir Frederick is still alive, his rights will not be impaired; but every day the chance of his return becomes slighter. No person can blame Roger, however, more severely than I do, nor feel Miss Derwent's injuries more deeply."

He turned away as he spoke, as if afraid of betraying his emotion, and paced up and down the narrow room, listening, as Mrs. Bingley had done, to every sound which mingled with the noise of the children at their play, and the faint murmur from the village street.

Mrs. Bingley's womanly penetration taught her to guess the feelings to which he did not think proper to allude more openly. She had always regarded him with admiration, and hoped that Laura would derive comfort from the presence of one so like, as she considered him, to her own rightminded, pious husband. It would have been easier to suppose that Arthur and Lewis were brothers, than that so near a relationship existed between the upright gentleman before her, and the surly, and, at the same time, mean, spirited and selfish owner of Languard.

She told Lewis that Miss Derwent had already suffered extremely from Roger's unfeeling conduct. Every one was surprised at the spirit shown by one usually so timid, but the hope she

still cherished of the news of her uncle's death being untrue, kept up her courage. While she remained at Maydwell, she said, she should feel that all was not over. It seemed like a cowardly abandonment of her post to quit the place.

They were conversing so earnestly that time wore away insensibly. Lewis turned pale with agitation, when a carriage stopped at the gate, and the children called out joyfully that their father and Miss Derwent were there. It was impossible to divine whether the sight of the young clergyman gave Laura consolation or inspired fresh emotion; but she gave him her hand kindly, and Mrs. Bingley's warm reception was not ungratefully acknowledged. The little cottage seemed safe and pleasant after all that she had lately endured; and the consciousness of having true and sympathising friends around her reconciled her in some measure to the change. She still persisted in regarding Sir Frederick's absence as a temporary one. He would, she felt certain, return, and eject the obnoxious intruders from

Maydwell. Whatever might be their real opinion, none of her present companions had the heart to undeceive her.

In one of the little chambers, with windows nestling in the thatch,—which, though the best Mr. Bingley's cottage afforded, was still very low and dark,—Clarice was sitting, despondently ruminating on her own and her friend's prospects, as she gazed with tearful eyes on the distant line of the sea. She did not see the pretty garden, nor the China roses clustering round the casement. Even the tokens of kindness which had been lavished upon her were wasted on the ungrateful girl. She looked thoroughly and hopelessly miserable.

At last, Laura came up and sat down by her, on the low window-sill, and put her arm round her, to comfort her. "I cannot bear to see you so unhappy, Clarice!"—she said, while her friend, giving way to her grief, laid her head on her shoulder, and wept passionately. "I feel a conviction at my heart that all will end well, and



that we shall soon return home. I am more certain to-day than yesterday that my uncle will come back; though I fancied it would be like giving up my last hope, if I were persuaded to leave Maydwell. How strange it is that I should be so sanguine, when you, whose spirits are usually buoyant, seem so utterly cast down!"

Her friend could not answer. She looked out again, through the rose-branches, and fixed her eyes on the sea. It seemed as though the very sight of it made her heart ache; after a few moments, she turned away. Laura looked at her with wonder.

"I must be very hard-hearted, Clarice. I do not feel this sad misfortune as you do; or, rather, I will not, I cannot believe that we shall not see my kind uncle again. But, how selfish I am not to recollect that you have other things to grieve you. Your mother's illness;—the uncertainty what you ought to do:"—she turned suddenly paler;—"Oh, Clarice! I cannot bear

you to leave me. Whatever happens, let us endure it together!"

A very bright and burning blush dried up the tears on Clarice's cheek. "I am afraid,"—she said softly,—“that I am very undutiful. I can think of nothing to-day but the pain of leaving Maydwell. I wish I could share your belief that happier days are speedily to return for the place, ourselves, and its absent master.”

“That is right, Clarice. He is absent, not—” Laura paused;—her lip quivered. “I cannot say the word. I will not believe that cruel, brightly smiling sea has taken all my nearest and dearest friends away from me,—deep down under its cold, clear waters.

She burst into tears, but quickly recovering, as if determined not to admit, even to herself, that her courage was failing, she said,

“Only stay with me, Clarice, and all will end well, yet!”

She threw her arms round her friend, imploringly, and held her close, as if fearing to lose

her. They sat thus for some time together, without speaking ;—with the roses peeping in at the low casement, which formed a frame to the picture ;—their young, fair faces, pale with sorrow and weeping, looking out upon the quiet garden, over which the shadows of the high trees were creeping.

It was a change, indeed, from the groves of Maydwell, and they both felt it bitterly. They were thinking how, at that moment, the twilight was stealing in upon the dear old-fashioned rooms, and settling, dark and still, upon the woods. The place was present to their eyes, quiet, serene and peaceful, as they might, perhaps, never more behold it. They shuddered as the thought intruded itself upon their sorrow, that, at this very instant, Roger Pemberton might be treading in the home of the Derwents. It was too painful an idea to dwell upon. Laura was the first to break silence.

“I hope that you have answered Baron Yermaloff’s letter as I could wish, Clarice. Whatever

we may suffer from leaving Maydwell, I cannot but think that we have acted as my uncle would desire. I do not believe that we were either of us in safety there. Surely you will not allow the representations of such a man to work upon your feelings sufficiently to make you trust yourself with him. He is, perhaps, exaggerating in these last sad accounts of your mother's illness."

Clarice seemed to recal her thoughts with an effort. Whether they were wandering in the Maydwell woods,—afar off on the distant sea,—or with her mother in the dungeon-like Slavonian palace, for which Madame Yermaloff had exchanged the gay saloons of Naples, could not be told. She well knew how distasteful to her would be the visit to his barbaric domains which Yermaloff had told her, with some plausibility, he had found necessary to recruit their finances, after the ruinous extravagance of the last year spent in Italy. If Clarice chose to return, he would immediately take the Baroness back to the society she was eminently fitted to adorn, and for

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which, he confessed, she seemed to languish ; but this was an imperative condition. She alone could define the term of her parent's banishment from civilisation.

Clarice was so accustomed to regard Yermaloff as a man who made truth and principle subservient to inclination, that she did not attach much importance to his statements. According to what suited his purposes, her poor mother had been forced to represent herself as ill or well,—had been spoiled by dissipation and flattery, or hurried off into retirement,—ever since she could recollect anything. Her childish reminiscences now placed her before her eyes, attired in velvet and satin and loaded with diamonds ; or shrinking and trembling in the desolate grandeur of the ill-furnished, half-ruined castle, in the heart of her husband's wide-spread but unproductive estates.

Madame Yermaloff was the creature of impulse, and apt to exaggerate in all her descriptions, which were either dazzlingly brilliant, or without

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a ray of light to dispel the gloom. The influence of her clever, dissipated husband over her was very great; and her fear of him, in his moods of savage passion, so excessive, that she was quite capable of overlooking the very serious evils which might result to her daughter and herself, from the steps that she took to conciliate him.

It did not surprise Clarice to find that the climate of the dull plains disagreed with her dreadfully. Since the Baron's arrival in England, Madame Yermaloff did not write to her daughter through any other channel. Her letters appeared to be enclosed in the correspondence which took place between herself and her husband. Clarice unfastened her writing-case, and took from it several of those which had been forwarded to her by Yermaloff. In each successive one, her mother's malady appeared to be gaining ground. No wonder, that with her constitutional tendency to bronchitis, her lungs should be affected by the keen air that blew over the dreary Croatian steppes!

The Baroness's style was so peculiar, and her handwriting so extremely feminine, as to preclude any doubt respecting the genuineness of the epistles; although, the absence of any topics of court-scandal or fashionable gossip obviated the necessity of having recourse to blanks and asterisks. Her husband, too, was no longer Mustapha, Blue Beard, or Fra Diavolo, but was simply mentioned as being in England. His absence and that of her daughter were alike regretted. Forsaken by her child and her husband, she was an object of pity to herself. Beppo and Lara alone remained faithful to her:

Matters appeared to grow worse daily. In the next letter, the wolves were howling under the very windows of the Chateau. Beppo and Lara were such constant sources of anxiety, on account of the ferocious animals, that their hapless mistress dared not trust them out of her sight. They were frightfully cross in consequence of their imprisonment. The Baroness was worn to a shadow

by their importunities and her own constant weeping.

Her latest attempt at composition contained a much more unfavourable account of herself than ever. She was a prey to illness and vexation ; with nothing within or without to give her comfort. It was impossible that she could survive many more weeks of such intense cold, and heart-wearying dulness. She conjured Clarice to return to her, as the only means of replacing her in the society and temperature which suited her delicate constitution. The atmosphere of her Slavonian prison was likely to be speedily fatal to her.

These querulous complaints would scarcely have appeared seriously alarming, had not the last epistle been accompanied by one from Baron Yermaloff, inclosing a few lines from his steward, expressing great concern at the alarming indisposition of the Baroness. Her health had been gradually failing ever since she reached the castle ; and great apprehensions were entertained respect-



ing the prolongation of her life. Baron Yermaloff declared himself to be greatly shocked by this intelligence, and occupied, consequently, in preparations for leaving England. He trusted that a sense of duty would effect what his persuasion had not accomplished ; and that Clarice would no longer hesitate about the propriety of returning to her mother.

The two girls looked over these letters together, as they had frequently done before, with the hope of discovering the fears they had raised to be unfounded. Laura was very uneasy lest her friend should comply with the Baron's wishes ; and believed that her lowness of spirits proceeded from the idea that it was her duty to accompany him. An insurmountable dislike to the person who had occasioned so much misery to them all, augmented her reluctance to part with Clarice ; and she argued with her indefatigably that no reliance was to be placed on reports conveyed through the medium of a person so much inter-

ested as Yermaloff in obtaining control over the young heiress.

One circumstance calculated to lighten the uneasiness with which they regarded these chronicles of failing health, was that the Baroness, perhaps with the benevolent wish of preventing their saddening her daughter's mind completely, or to beguile the hours of her tedious solitude, had enlivened them with graphic delineations referring to the few events which diversified the day. Here and there, a few strokes of the pen or pencil set Beppo and Lara before the reader. At the bottom of one page, an enormous wolf had been vigorously sketched.

The talent for caricature, and for every description of *jeu de société*, which made the Baroness the idol of the gay circles of Naples, had not forsaken her. She had invented some exceedingly clever charades and proverbs, and only longed for an opportunity of acting them. Even in the last epistle, which was decidedly of a lugu-

brrious character,—after a long and minute observation, Clarice discovered that the crest of the Yermaloffs, which usually surmounted the first page of her mother's letters, was not stamped on the paper, in this instance, but delicately painted in colours. Madame Yermaloff had ventured upon a slight variation in the heraldic attributes of the armed man issuing from a tower, which formed the badge of her second husband's martial ancestors. This was certainly the first occasion when this time-honoured warrior had ever been represented as being blessed or cursed with a beard of mazarine blue!

It was unlikely that the lady,—if she were indeed so near to death as her husband and his satellites chose to assert,—would feel inclined to amuse herself with these eccentric illustrations of what was, perhaps, the hidden meaning of her letters.

Mustapha was still Blue-Beard, though she might not choose to call him so in the communications which passed through his hands, albeit

they bore no sign of having been opened. It might be her intention, Laura suggested, to give some secret warning to her daughter that her domestic tyrant, even in absence, exercised authority over her actions and expressions, as well as to prevent her being too much distressed by the otherwise gloomy character of her epistles, that Clarice's mother had designed the sketches of birds, beasts, and fishes, and various strange hieroglyphics, with which they were copiously interspersed, and which, probably, the Baron, if he saw them at all, considered as a convincing proof of their authenticity.

## CHAPTER X.

THOUGH Mr. and Mrs. Bingley were exceedingly kind, Miss Derwent could not but be sensible that the children and the pupils amply sufficed to fill every corner of the cottage. She was unable to make up her mind to go far from Maydwell; and resolved to await in one of the tiny lodging-houses the event which she still confidently anticipated;—Sir Frederick Derwent's return.

The watering-place was now comparatively empty. The green doors and garden gates were undergoing the process of painting, previous to the commencement of the season; if, indeed, any gaiety could be expected when the main-spring of all animation was suddenly broken. The shopkeepers sullenly protested that it was of no use ordering fresh stores of goods. No one would be

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at the trouble of coming to Fordington, now that Maydwell Place was no longer an object of interest.

Roger Pemberton had shut up the walks through the grounds, which his predecessor good-naturedly left open. There was no talk of the cricket-ground being put in order for the players. In fact, it was impossible to say what the new occupant of the Hall would do for the good of the community. None of the neighbouring families seemed at present, inclined to call upon him. Except the young nobleman from Stanmore Park, Baron Yermaloff, and two or three foreign officers, who had gone over to Languard during his illness, the family at the Place had, as yet, received no visitors.

Every cottage at Fordington, where lodgings had ever been let, was at Laura's disposal, as soon as it was known that she wished to leave the Parsonage, and was in want of a residence. Even places where it was a matter of tradition that the owners had ever received an inmate for hire,—

where a bill had never appeared in the windows,— entered into negotiations with her privately, for the honour of the thing.

Laura's choice was determined by Clarice's happening to remind her of an expression of Sir Frederick's, the first day that he drove them to the watering-place. Her uncle had said, the small detached cottage, at the corner of the lane leading to the sea, with a long strip of garden at the back, shaded by the elm-trees planted on either side of the narrow road, was the pleasantest house in Fordington. He generally drove a little slower, and sometimes stopped for a moment, to inhale the scent of the honeysuckle which climbed over the porch and up to the roof of the building, and to point out, through the arched doorway, which stood open, whenever the house was to let, as a temptation to summer visitants, how green and fresh the grass and flowers were springing up, in the tiny domain appertaining to Marina Cottage.

Miss Derwent and Clarice felt very sad and

lonely, when they had established themselves in this temporary home. It was true that Mr. and Mrs. Bingley did not suffer them to be really solitary ; and Lewis Pemberton had again taken possession of the widow's lodgings, a little farther up the street ; but the very sight of the broken blind in front of the opposite shop, where, on account of the dulness of the present season, there was hardly any attempt at display, reminded them painfully of the alacrity with which the best and freshest wares were brought forth, and all the inhabitants in Fordington rushed to their doors when Sir Frederiok drove through the place. It was as if the entire population were taking a siesta, from which the horn of the day mail scarcely awakened them. The bathing machines were not yet put out upon the sands ; and the old man was going about the town, with his obedient horse, drawing the small supplies of coals required to air the empty lodging-houses.

Mr. Bingley quite agreed with Lewis Pemberton that Laura and Clarice could not be too



cautious in their proceedings. The beach was so solitary that it was unsafe for the young ladies to walk alone. The old servants, Reynolds and Dixon, who had remained at Maydwell in the hope that master would ere long take possession of his own again, and believing that, meanwhile, it was highly necessary to have responsible persons there to look after his interests,—reported that very strange conversations took place at Roger Pemberton's table. After dinner, especially, the young ladies' names were freely mentioned.

More than once Clarice shrank back from the window fronting that way of the cottage in Fordington, upon seeing, through the laburnums and fuchsias, the Austrian officers ride up the street. Faithful to the memory of Sir Frederick, the slumbering town received them with indifference. No one came to the door to look at them.

The walks through the fields, on the opposite side of the place to the sea, which were the great charm of Fordington, all led round, in some way

or other, to the domain of Maydwell. The watering-place was as completely spoiled by the blight which had fallen upon the family at the Hall, as if the waves had been suddenly kept back from breaking on the beach. Indeed, at this season, before the bathing commenced, and while the winds were still very cutting, their banishment from the pretty hawthorn hedges and flowering banks of the lanes and footpaths, was a greater deprivation to the few inmates of the village. They seemed, however, to have come to a tacit resolution not to walk that way.

Mr. Holcombe declared that Maydwell, without Sir Frederick, was perfectly intolerable. He was very much offended with Laura for going to Mr. Bingley's ; though it had not occurred to him to invite her and her friend to the Parsonage. Of course, he should have done so, if she had consulted him concerning the propriety of leaving her uncle's house. Mr. Bingley had forestalled him ; but she ought to have known that, as the clergyman of the parish, and Sir Frederick's

intimate and trusted friend, *he* was the person to whom she should have had recourse.

It was too great a temptation for him to withstand, when, at the moment of his being most disgusted with Sir Frederick's successor, and his mode of transacting the business in which it was necessary for them to engage, an opportunity arose of throwing the whole thing off his shoulders. A much better living than Maydwell, for which he had long been waiting, was offered to him. Mr. Holcombe did not hesitate long before accepting it.

Had there been the slightest chance of Derwent's return, he said, he would not have given Roger Pemberton the pleasure of believing himself at liberty to give away the next presentation; but Mr. Holcombe had become somewhat suddenly convinced that no man in his senses could doubt the evidence which existed of his unfortunate friend's having perished at sea.

There was nothing in the world which he would not have felt inclined to do, out of regard for his

memory, except, perhaps, the conscientious fulfilment of the trust Sir Frederick had bequeathed to him. In this, Mr. Holcombe confessed that he found considerable difficulty. Roger Pemberton was a person no gentleman liked to encounter. He had taken advantage of the blameable carelessness of Miss Derwent's advisers, in permitting him to enter into possession of Maydwell Place, on the understanding that the plate, pictures, and other articles of personal property belonging to the family, were afterwards to be removed.

A very natural reluctance, on Laura's part, to dismantle her uncle's house, while she still entertained the hope of his return, had prevented her making use of the time which, Roger now affirmed, had been granted her for preparation. He still professed himself ready to become the purchaser, at a fair valuation, of everything the house contained; but he put forward claims to a large amount for dilapidations, which, he said, must be settled before he would allow the smallest trifle to be taken off the premises. The servants

stood their ground as well as they could, but Rebecca was more than a match for Mrs. Dixon.

The housekeeper had been too long used to Sir Frederick's ways, to adapt herself readily to those of her new master and mistress. Reynolds locked the door of the garden-parlour and dressing-room, and dropped the key into the Lady's Well, sooner than let Roger Pemberton take possession, as he believed he meant to do, of Sir Frederick's numerous coats and hats, in the vain attempt to look like his predecessor.

It was not in his power, as yet, to touch the rents of the estate. He had money in the Bank at Fordington; where the sum placed to his account was diminishing far more rapidly than, pound by pound, it had accumulated, under Rebecca's thrifty management at Languard. Until Michaelmas, this was all upon which he could reckon; and these funds, under Yermaloff's and the foreign officers' auspices, were sinking remarkably low.

Rebecca had fallen in, very readily, with her

lord and master's humour, which prompted him to desire that she should dress as fine and spend as much money as any lady in the land. To look like one was beyond the vulgar woman's power; but she took possession of the rooms which had belonged to old Madam Derwent, as she was called, and surveyed herself in the cheval-glass, arrayed in showy silks and satins, with great complacency. Her principal amusement was in ransacking the hoards which almost every old family contrives to accumulate. The rich brocades and hooped petticoats of the females of the Derwent line rustled with indignation, as Rebecca felt the thick fabrics, and measured off the breadths, to ascertain their width and for what purposes they might be made available, upon her stumpy fingers.

She no longer spoiled her hands by rough usage. If idleness would, as, perhaps, she vainly hoped, have made them as white and soft as Laura Derwent's, Rebecca would have been a happier woman. As it was, she felt uncom-

fortable, when she sat at dinner, and saw that useful but decidedly not ornamental member beside Baron Yermaloff's pale, aristocratic-looking hand. The poor mistress of Languard had pickled too many walnuts, and drysalted too many sides of bacon, ever to recover the delicate texture of her skin. She hid her arms under the table-cloth, and silently wished that her elegant neighbour had done as much hard work in his time as had fallen to her share.

Roger scarcely took matters more philosophically. He was an altered being. A puerile ambition possessed his soul, inciting him to become what neither education nor the habits of his former life had fitted him for. On this point, if on no other, Yermaloff was the rough yeoman's superior; and he was making him pay a high price for learning to live like a gentleman.

According to the dissipated foreigner's acceptance of the term, pleasure was to be the object of his life. It was a hard toil to that beetle-browed, heavy-hearted man to make a fool of

himself; but he succeeded tolerably well in the endeavour. He learned to drink hard and to play high. He had, in fact, nothing else to do. All his habitual occupations he was now taught to think derogatory; and he did not wish to have too much time for reflection.

Like the sword of Damocles, the fear of Derwent's return hung over his festively-spread board. Though he would not avow to others that the slightest possibility of such an event existed, he woke up in the night with cold dews standing on his forehead, and dim visions haunting his broken slumbers, of the sea giving up its dead. In the morning he felt braver; and went about with his hands in his pockets, counting the promise of fruit on the walls of the kitchen-garden, and reckoning the months, weeks, and days till Michaelmas, when all would seem doubly his own. Yet often, at the end of one of the straight walks, he would stand still, and his strong limbs shake like those of an old man stricken with palsy, if the sight of a gardener



crossing the turf, or any casual appearance of hurry or excitement in the manner of a servant approaching him from the mansion, made him fancy, for a moment, that some unusual event had occurred.

When Sunday came round, he sat in Sir Frederick's place in the large pew in the chancel, and read the service from the great prayer-book on the antique desk ; but his brow grew darker than ever when he found that the hinds did not lift their hats, nor the school-girls curtsy to him. The bells still refused to ring out ; but this could be rectified. He had sent to the county-town, to desire some person who understood the business, to come over and set them to rights.

These unpleasantnesses in time would pass away. Sir Frederick's death a matter of certainty, people would doubtless do homage to the rising star. He could scarcely wonder that, in spite of all the evidence brought forward, men still questioned a fact which he should not, himself, feel perfectly convinced was real, until the

rents of the property were paid over to him. A shadow on the sunny walk, an echo of his own voice under the wall, often made his flesh creep with terror; but every day that passed lessened his apprehensions. Rebecca was more stout-hearted, and, like Jezabel, laughed at his scruples; or, if his fears infected her, packed up in her trunks any article which she thought might be useful, in case of a sudden removal. It was better, at all events, to provide against the worst that might happen, and secure themselves from being losers by the steps which her husband had taken.

Roger had never felt so well satisfied with his position, nor so entirely master of Maydwell, as when Mr. Holcombe announced his intention of vacating the living.

Rebecca, on the contrary, looked ill pleased. Long as she had lived with him, she did not understand her husband; and believed that the object of her constant antipathy,—Lewis,—would be the better for the circumstance.

"Hold thee head up, Dame!" said Roger, as she sat pouting over the Rector's note. "Thee shan't have Gentleman Lewis and that white-faced girl, to sit under and opposite to in church. The Derwents have had their turn here; and, as he chooses to stick to them, Lewis may starve for me, unless they provide him with a dinner. I have parted with the next presentation, weeks ago, to a man that is a stranger, and won't look down upon his patron."

Rebecca Pemberton's eyes glistened with delight. "That's the best thing you have done, Roger, since we came to live here. The servants say it is sure to be a match between Miss Derwent and Lewis. I'd sooner, for my part, be living at the farm again, than have them settled at the Rectory, and every person in the place looking up to them."

"No fear of that," answered Roger, shortly. "I knew Holcombe meant to give up the living, and provided for his having a successor. Lewis must look elsewhere for preferment. He has not

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stood by me, and shall never be the better for any good luck that befalls me, if I can prevent it.

He gazed sourly down as he spoke. Already the thorn was in his side. His brother was as surely his heir as he had been Sir Frederick Derwent's; and there was not much more good will between them.

It was now a great source of grief to him that his union was a childless one. There was very little chance of his surviving Rebecca. Unwonted dissipation had already made considerable inroads upon his health. His stout, hard-featured wife far surpassed him in strength of constitution. If he could have devised any pretext for a divorce, Rebecca's tried fidelity would not have been sufficient to prevent her new dignities from being taken from her.

At other times, he was rather disposed to be jealous. The English blood in his veins, poisoned as it was by malice, revolted from the sentiments uttered by Yermaloff and his friends, when Sir Frederick's generous wine made their speech flow

unrestrainedly. He did not like to see these foreigners free of the place, and intimate with his wife. He felt disposed to eject them summarily.

“I tell thee what, Dame ;—if I see them cursed foreigneering chaps overhauling your rings and trumpery, and buttoning those fine French gloves, that ’ll never come to without bursting, across your fat wrist,—I’ll wallop them !”—he burst forth, one day, with a degree of honest indignation. “They and thee had best be packing, if thee art going to take after their bad ways. Have a care, I say ! Thee wast a better wife to me, at Languard, before thy brain was turned with compliments and fine clothes. Not that I grudge them—but, remember, I won’t stand nonsense !”

Thus warned, Rebecca stoutly resisted the flatteries of her guests, who did not hesitate to pay court to the lady of the house which they chose to favour with their presence. Roger watched them grimly. He was beginning to be thoroughly tired of the whole set, and to wonder

whether he had not been more contented, riding the old cart-horse about his farm at Languard, than living a life of idleness, and sitting behind Sir Frederick's coachman in effeminate ease, while the man drove the light sorrel steeds in the phaeton, heartily wishing at every step that the impatient horses would break the new master's neck, even though his own might run the same risk. Roger, angry with his driving, laid his heavy hand on the reins once, and only once. The horses reared and plunged, as if the Enemy of Mankind were behind them, or Sir Frederick's ghost in the path which he urged them to pursue; and then, turning short round, and taking the bit in their teeth, ran away with him fairly to the gates of Maydwell. He had not attempted to drive them again.

## CHAPTER XI.

IN spite of the long period which had elapsed without bringing tidings of Sir Frederick, Laura was constantly expecting to see the little gate into the lane open, and her kind uncle enter the garden of the cottage. She never heard the horn of the mail-guard, that she did not feel certain of receiving a letter by the post; nor borrowed the solitary coast-guard's telescope, to look at some vessel in the offing, without a sensation of disappointment at perceiving that it showed no intention of landing a passenger on the beach.

There had been a little more stir and bustle on the sands, lately, in consequence of the sailors belonging to a foreign ship frequently going to and fro. Baron Yermaloff had engaged a passage in her, and messages were continually being sent

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between the trading vessel and the shore. The small neighbouring sea-port, where she rode at anchor, was plainly visible from the beach at Fordington, lying in the opposite curve of the bay;—its white sea walls and pier stretching out along the coast, with the masts of the coal-brigs and small craft rising above them.

The suspense in which they lived made both Laura and Clarice very restless. The narrow bounds of the cottage-garden did not admit of their taking exercise there, and they had necessarily very little occupation within doors. Their books and drawing materials had all been left at Maydwell, in the hurry of their removal; and they had already found that it was by no means easy to regain possession of any article of their property, after it had once fallen into Roger Pemberton's keeping. There was no library at Fordington; even if their minds had not been too much engrossed to be easily diverted from the topic which interested them both so deeply.


Mr. and Mrs. Bingley, with whom Laura had



always been a favourite, admired her more than ever, when they saw her striving to take part in their benevolent duties ; visiting the cottages and the schools, and adapting herself cheerfully to her new mode of life. Their encouragement and that of Lewis, stimulated her to fresh exertions.

This constant support and kindness was exactly what she needed ; and with real and very pressing anxiety at her heart, Laura continued to bear up more bravely against the tide of evil fortune than Clarice. Either her uncertainty respecting the course which she ought to pursue, or the reports spread about of Yermaloff's designs, made the young heiress unusually timid and depressed.

She never stirred out without Laura, and their walks were always accompanied by Lewis Pemberton or Mr. Bingley. The voices of the foreign sailors, sometimes lingering on the shore, filled her with apprehension ; and, every day, the necessity of taking some steps to secure herself from annoyance was disagreeably forced upon her.



Clarice could not help comparing her feelings now, with what they had been, a year before, when she first came to Maydwell. No cares had visited her then ; or if the trials and persecution which induced her to accompany her friend to England, had appeared in that light, she remembered, at present, only the kindness which rendered everything pleasant ;—the flattering reception which, even as a dependant companion of Laura's, placed her directly at her ease ;—the care evinced that all should treat her with distinction.

Laura, even while doing her very utmost to keep Clarice with her, unconsciously gave her many uneasy sensations. The poor girl often felt miserably lonely, while loitering with her and Lewis upon the shore. It was no longer difficult to see that they were occupied with their own hopes and schemes. The Bingleys had always made Laura a principal object. Clarice felt herself a stranger among them.

Even Laura's sympathy she had ceased to possess to the same extent as formerly. Her

friend was inclined to be very impatient with Clarice's inveterate melancholy. She could not bear to read in her tearful eyes confirmation of the fears which occasionally beset her, and turned to Lewis Pemberton for support in believing that there were still grounds for hope.

The old grey-headed butler stole over to Fordington, one evening, to give the young ladies warning not to be out late on the beach. He had heard loud words pass between his new master and Baron Yermaloff. Some said the foreigners had outstayed their welcome;—that they had taken liberties, and received notice to quit the premises. Reynolds only wondered that they had been allowed to infest them so long. For his part, he had often been inclined to shut up the best rooms, and turn the keys against them, to prevent their cooking their outlandish messes in the parlours and bedchambers, and smoking their cigars in the drawing-room.

The Baron's luggage had been carried down to the quay at Fordington, and a boat hired to

convey it to the vessel. He talked of meaning to sleep on board that night ; but the servants did not believe that he intended going so soon: They had heard bets made among the foreign gentlemen, which alarmed them about the young ladies. Miss Derwent and Mr. Bingley were advised, especially, not to let Miss Le Sage be out of their sight. There was great danger, it appeared, of her being spirited off, on account of her fortune.

Reynolds had been greatly scandalised by the behaviour of Roger Pemberton's guests.. Though Sir Frederick, before his niece came to stay with him, had not been the most precise formalist in the world, everything in the mansion was conducted decorously. He had been careless, but not dissipated. Roger, on the contrary, led a toilsome life, amidst what he called taking his pleasure.

The storm appeared to have blown over. The Austrian officers continued to ride through Fordington, and stare in at the cottage windows.

Yermaloff's head-quarters were at Maydwell, and the ship still rode quietly at anchor in the bay. Either Reynolds's information was not correct, or Roger and his friends had made up their differences. He did not exactly know, perhaps, what he should do without them.

Lady Fortescue was very angry at the evacuation of Maydwell to the enemy; and declared that, if she had been consulted, the place might have held out. All Sir Frederick's friends ought to have made common cause against Roger Pemberton. Colonel Mac Alpine should have sent a handful of red-coats, to defend the lodge-gates. A gun planted on each of the bridges at the end of the lawn, would have been sufficient to prevent the great bully from making good his entrance. Roger had shown the white feather, already, on more than one occasion; and, if vigorously opposed, would no doubt have showed that he considered discretion the wisest part of valour, and effected an ignominious retreat to the farm.

Miss Derwent liked to talk to her. There was

a degree of enthusiasm about the widow's character,—a startling energy in her propositions, which awakened hope in the very face of despair. All her sympathies were enlisted in the cause ; and, like a gallant warrior, she fought more and more bravely, as the fortunes of the day grew darker for her country.

“It is not as if Sir Frederick were a common character. I regard his loss as a misfortune to the neighbourhood :—she said, one day, when she and Clarice were walking up and down the lawn, from which the pepper-castor turrets overlooked the surrounding scenery. “Put it in any manner you please, people are too supine. We ought to be up and stirring. Why don't we all do something ;—subscribe and send out a frigate?—Government would do its part, if the case were properly represented. I look upon it as inconceivable that nothing has yet been attempted.”

The widow took some tremendously long strides, and then pursued the subject. She was looking considerably older than in the summer,

and was said to have vowed that, if the Baronet were not forthcoming within the twelvemonth, she would lay aside her gay ribbons and feathers, resume the widow's black, and wear it to the day of her death.

“What a heart he showed when the cholera was among us! I shall never forgive myself for not coming back from Bath to nurse him. He was not quite himself after that terrible illness; and I dare say, had twitches of rheumatism flying about him, which made him feel uncomfortable, and irritated his nerves. His was never a quarrelsome temper. He was not properly advised about that duel. The Colonel made an absolute simpleton of himself, hurrying him off the field and on board ship, as if he had committed forgery, instead of conducting himself, as he always did, like a perfect gentleman. So many duels as I have seen Sir Andrew put a stop to in the regiment! Even if an encounter took place, it ended with a scratch on the arm, or some trifling injury;—not one terminated so

disastrously as this has done. Galty Macpherson was silly enough to think of challenging him, when he ran away with you, at the Races ; but the boy had the grace to be ashamed of himself, when I represented to him that his life was of no sort of value, compared to that of a person like Sir Frederick.

“ What is the use of our having a Government at all, or county members or magistrates, or, in short, any one to look after us, if such a man is to be lost to the country without any search, even after his remains, being instituted? We send ships to look after those poor unhappy missionaries at Cape Horn. Men are picked off by scores on the coast of Africa, taking care of those wretched blacks. One hears of expedition after expedition sailing in pursuit of poor Franklin. How is it that not one of us has thought of dispatching as much as a herring-boat, to cruize up the Channel and look out for some relic of our best friend? If it were only his watch—if anybody had brought back his pocket-book or walk-



ing-stick, it would be some proof,—a melancholy satisfaction, that we had done our utmost. As it is, I will not give up the hope that, before the summer ends, we shall have him back again at Maydwell.”

Penelope’s affection was less enduring than the gay widow’s. She felt that nothing more could be expected from her ; and laid aside her mourning when Mr. Holcombe quitted the Parsonage. It was disagreeable to go into another neighbourhood, with the fetters of an unfortunate attachment still hanging about her. Since Roger Pemberton had established himself at Maydwell, this sensible female’s regard for his predecessor had perceptibly and rapidly declined. Had he been unmarried, she would probably have tried her chance again in that quarter ; but, as Rebecca stood in the way, she sighed her last sigh for the groves of Maydwell ; and betook herself with a lighter heart and a determined spirit, which, quiet as she looked, never forsook her, to find among the prebends and beneficed clergy in

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the neighbourhood of the Cathedral town which was to be her brother's residence, an eligible, though, probably, not an entertaining successor to the mercurial Baronet.

Mrs. Holcombe had always thought remarkably well of Penelope. It was decidedly not her fault that Sir Frederick had not fallen into the toils; and she cordially coincided with her husband in the wish to see her suitably established. The last three months had thoroughly disgusted them; and they were quite as ready as the still slightly dejected spinster to try the effect of change of air and scene.

Maydwell had always been a dull place; but, without Sir Frederick Derwent for a neighbour, it had become perfectly uninhabitable. The sooner they quitted it, and allowed Roger to induct the new clergyman, who seemed likely to be as subservient as his tyrannical disposition exacted, the better for all parties, except, perhaps, for the luckless villagers. *They* regretted Mr. Holcombe, though he had never taken pains to

become popular among them. Roger's choice was not likely to have been guided by any other consideration than the best offer made for the presentation, and spite towards his brother and the Derwents. Mr. Holcombe was a gentleman, and had been chosen by Sir Frederick. The last remains of the old régime seemed passing away, when the Rector's family left the pretty Parsonage-house in the village.

Lewis Pemberton had been deeply mortified by the discovery that Roger had parted with the next presentation to the living of Maydwell, the moment that he obtained a claim upon the property. The malice evinced by such a measure ;—the entire forgetfulness of his interest as well as of all family affection, grieved him to the heart. Much as he had already suffered by Roger's unkindness, he had not expected that he would deal thus hardly by his only brother.

This disappointment of a hope, which, as he was unconscious of Sir Frederick's unfriendly resolutions against him, Lewis had at times enter-

tained, would have silenced, perhaps, the avowal of his sentiments for Laura, had not the die been cast beforehand, and her fate inseparably connected with his own. The present period of suspense and uncertainty on almost every other point, had taught them to understand each other. He respected her deep anxiety concerning the fate of her uncle, and did not press for the acknowledgment of their engagement. It was his wish, on the contrary, to work hard, and secure for himself an independence which might place him on a proper footing of equality, before he claimed her hand. He only felt that he could not leave her at present. Every one but Laura knew that the time was fast approaching, when even she must give up hope; and Lewis was determined to stand by her through what he feared would prove a severer trial, the longer she shrank from encountering it.

It was only to Laura Derwent, as they sat in the twilight looking out upon the sea, in the little drawing-room of Marina Cottage, that

Lewis confessed how much he had been wounded by Roger's conduct. A vague hope had always previously been in his mind that he should, at some period of his life, fulfil the anticipations of his youth, and become the pastor of the parish where his first sermon had been preached.

"I cannot explain upon what it was founded. Nothing might be more unlikely:" he said, as he sat talking to her, on the same evening when the Holcombes left the village. "But the impression has been strong on my part that no destiny would suit me better than to live amongst those who have always seemed to me like my own people, and who have loved me from a child;—to visit them in their cottages, and address them in that dim, ivy-mantled church, where I have so often of late fancied my early dreams realised."

"It may be so yet, Lewis," Laura answered, earnestly. "This presentation is void. My uncle will yet return. He must see that your claim is superior to all others. It appeared so to me, even at first, when I scarcely knew you, and

only heard that you had been brought up with the expectation of succeeding your relative. It gave me quite a dislike to the Holcombes. They did not suit the place. I could not bear to see those worldly-minded people occupying the pretty rustic Parsonage-house, with its shaded windows peeping out among the clustering roses and ivy-leaves;—at ease in their possessions, yet carelessly contemptuous about their duties and responsibilities. I always fancied that they had usurped your rightful station.”

Lewis looked at her gratefully. He knew that ideas like these were in her mind, but she had never expressed them so plainly. Now, when he was vexed and mortified, her gentle nature urged her to be candid.

For a moment, his thoughts reverted to the tranquil Rectory, picturing it as a scene of quiet serene happiness: — the low but pleasant rooms, with their deep-embrasured casements;—the recesses filled with books;—the old turf walks and verdant alcove;—the yew hedges Miles

Pemberton had planted, and the trim parterre, as Lewis remembered it in his boyhood, coming down to the road-side, with the flower beds full of hyacinths and tulips in the spring;—the chesnuts, acacias and lilacs bursting into bloom, and hiding the cottages in the village.

“ It is all over, I fear, for ever,” he said. “ If your uncle returns, as I hope and trust he may, it is very doubtful whether he will overlook the part my brother has acted, sufficiently to be as much my friend as formerly. I must, at all events, exert myself to prove that I am worthy of his esteem. The pleasant life of which I have dreamed is not within my reach ; and the one I have lately been leading does not suit me. It might do for others, but I am vowed to the service of a higher Master ; and the literary pursuits which, as a relaxation, were delightful to me, now that they are my principal employment, appear unsatisfactory. I would rather be the active minister of the poorest country parish, than the greatest author and poet of the age. All my

ambition points that way ; and I shall engage in my present occupations only until an opportunity is afforded me of taking upon myself what I consider a far nobler task."

Lewis paused ;—his high, pale forehead and intellectual countenance lighted up with the inspiration of genius which he prized so little. Laura, who knew from the Bingleys what proud triumphs his talents had achieved, in the literary world to which his writings had introduced him, listened to him with increased respect, as he unfolded to her the cherished aim and object of his life. There was nothing hard or ascetic in his piety. Love towards God and man was the ruling spirit of his actions. It was because he knew every labouring man in the village, every distressed and afflicted soul ;—the wants and wishes of all, their faults and merits, that Lewis so earnestly desired to officiate at Maydwell. It was to lead no easy, pleasant life, half given up to the amusements of society, half to the service of his Maker ;—but to devote himself, mind and



body, to a glorious purpose :—to speak to those who dwelt in darkness of the light which had sprung up in his own soul :—to perform that earnest Missionary work which is so sorely needed in many an English parish :—to preach where he believed that his words would fall with most effect ; and address the great talents God had given him to the solemn duty which he had taken upon him.

Laura could not restrain her tears while she listened to his earnest, eloquent sentences. She knew that, in the life of toil and self-sacrifice which he had planned, her society was to be his solace, her sympathy the stimulus to exertion. Timid as was her character, she believed that with such a mind to uphold and strengthen hers, she could share his labours.

But not at Maydwell. Laura felt, more strongly and decidedly than Lewis, that any abode would suit them better than where that revengeful man had taken her uncle's place. She could not have borne to see Lewis wearing his life away in vain

attempts to rectify the evil which Roger would commit. Every day, they were learning how much the condition of the peasantry was deteriorating under their new landlord. The improvements commenced by Sir Frederick were regarded with peculiar spite by his successor. He had discontinued the erection of the model cottages and almshouses, and their unfinished walls were left to crumble away. Again the village was becoming a scene of neglect and untidiness. The stimulus to reformation was withdrawn; and all those who had been favourites with Sir Frederick, and co-operated in his laudable endeavours, found themselves hopelessly in disgrace. Laura thought that she could endure more bravely the horrors of a crowded London parish, or the hardships of a life of missionary labour, than living at the Rectory, when the Derwents had given place to the Pembertons at the Hall.

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## CHAPTER XII.

It was the first summer-day which there had been this season, the market-people said who came into Fordington, from the neighbouring villages, to dispose of their vegetables and poultry. The little town appeared more animated than it had lately done; and it was reported that, for the first time, some single ladies had been enquiring for lodgings. The master of the shop looked seriously at the broken blind, and gave orders to the apprentice to see about its being mended. The bathing-machines were released from their imprisonment in the yard at the back of the coal wharf, and drawn down to the beach; though, as yet, no one had made use of them. There was a promise of life about the watering-place, but not its fulfilment.

Nature had done her part to bring visitors to

the town. The hills and dales wore their greenest livery. The sea and sky were cloudlessly serene. All along the banks, a flush of summer flowers had come out. The pretty field pathways that led to Languard and Maydwell, with numberless foot-bridges crossing the winding brook, presented their most inviting appearance.

The beautiful chain of hills which sheltered the domain of Maydwell, upon whose varied summits Clarice and Laura could not look without tears, was distinctly marked out against the clear blue sky. Dark and prominent, the gables of the old house of Languard, and the outline of the chapel on the hill, rose above the pleasant valley ; while, far away, in every varying tint of summer's freshest foliage, stretched to the west the swelling undulations of the romantic scenery, where Carysfort nestled among the woods, and the peaked summits crowned by Roman fortifications—the ancient camps or castles—shot boldly upwards.

Even the little garden of Marina Cottage showed symptoms of the favourable change in

the weather. The window of the diminutive breakfast-room, which Laura had assigned to Clarice as a boudoir, stood widely open. The balcony above, which belonged to the drawing-room, was turned into a cage or nest, and almost concealed by the luxuriant branches of the honeysuckle ; and the two girls, in their light muslin dresses, were sitting out upon the lawn at the back of the house. Every corner of the borders was full of flowers, excepting where the utilitarian propensities of the owner of the dwelling had induced him to plant rows of thriving gooseberry bushes and raspberries. It was all in keeping,—homely and pleasant-looking ; but Laura and Clarice felt, that bright, glaring day, a weight upon their spirits. Another epoch in their lives had arrived, without bringing the same fresh, joyous animation to their existence, which the summer wind had breathed over the woodlands.

It was almost a relief to Clarice, when Laura rose from her seat, and went into the cottage. She could now drop her work from her hands,

and sit gazing idly upon vacancy. Her thoughts flew back to the time, when, full of sanguine fancies, she had first seen the sun set over the smiling valleys of the west country. The hills and dales, bathed in the purple twilight mist, faded one by one into indistinctness ; while dark and shadowy as it had then done, with the pale young moon ascending above the trees, but not illuminating them, rose before her mind's eye the ancient house at Languard. Gradually, the sunny scene becomes obscured. The gloom cast by the high gables creeps over the landscape, filling up the valley, gliding in film over the brook, lowering the crests of the airy, castellated heights ;—or is it that her eyes are so blinded by tears, that she can no longer distinguish what, a moment since, was like a beautiful picture spread before her in imagination ?

Clarice laid her forehead on her clasped hands, and sobbed bitterly. She closed her burning eyelids, and, as the wind rushed through the elm branches in the lane,—as it will do, harmo-

niously, wherever green leaves and zephyrs meet, even in the most unpromising locality,—and the swallows twittered about the eaves, she thought of the birds singing and breezes playing among the groves of Maydwell. Wandering as they liked, the winds of Heaven, with their minstrelsy, sounded in her ear;—rising slowly and tremulously, none knew whence;—passing on their mysterious way, no man can tell whither;—now tossing the fir-branches with a solemn, dirge-like sound;—then whispering low in the ash-stems;—ruffling the waters of the Lady's Well, as though its master's step approached the wood-nymph's shrine.

The fancy was so strong that, for an instant, the sound of a man's footstep behind her on the gravel did not startle her. It seemed to fall in with her thoughts. The next moment, she recollected her position, and glanced round in terror. Latterly, she had been very timid; and the reports of the servants, the gossip of the watering-place, made her see an enemy and dread

a persecutor in every stranger who approached her.

The person entering the garden, through the arched doorway from the street, was certainly a most suspicious-seeming character. When she looked up, his back was towards her. He was carefully closing the private portal of which he had taken advantage. A pilot coat and dread-nought hat, thoroughly incongruous with the first smiling day of real summer, disguised his figure, which was, however, decidedly of commanding build. Something of a foreign air lurked in the dark exuberant whiskers, just visible beneath the broad flaps of the sombrero-like coiffure; and visions of the foreign vessel in the bay gleamed across the terrified girl's imagination.

She rose hastily from her seat, intending to return to the house. Her limbs trembled;—a thousand mingled sensations overpowered her, as the stranger approached so quickly that she could

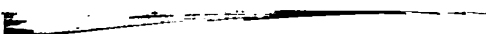


not put in practice her contemplated flight. She was in his arms, half fainting ;—his lips close to hers ;—his glad utterance of her name sounding sweetly in her ears ;—before she recognised Sir Frederick Derwent.

The cry she had uttered brought Laura to her side. The two girls now received the same warm, almost fatherly embrace. No one could have perceived,—the first moments of agitation over,—that Sir Frederick made any difference between them.

He held a hand of each of his fair companions in his own, as he sat between them, and told the tale of his wanderings. Unless the fair fingers thus tenderly imprisoned revealed it, there was no possibility of judging which received the closest pressure. Wonder, embarrassment, and pleasure, were nearly equally marked in glowing blushes on the faces turned towards him. Truly, Sir Frederick must have been the most captious of mortals, if he were not satisfied with his reception.

He did not dwell upon the trials through which



he had passed. With pain, as they watched his countenance, after the first excitement of that glad meeting subsided, they could tell that he had suffered. But he was come back to claim his own again. They had him safely between them ; and Sir Frederick did not appear in any hurry to escape from the soft bonds of affection cast, in those unrestrained moments of joy, about him.

It was not needful, in his recital, to linger over the agony of mind in which, after the false report of Yermaloff's death had reached him, he had cast his lot with the crew of the doomed vessel, and departed for a time from England. His intention was to write from the first port at which she touched ; but this had been frustrated. Neither could he tell them calmly of that fierce strife, when the cry of the despairing seamen went up to Heaven, mingling with the angry roar of the billows, and the breath of the scorching flame. For the first time, the love of life returned, when he saw his fellow-creatures strug-

gling round him ; and he lashed himself to a spar of the burning ship, and leaped into the water.

Two of the sailors had aided him in getting hold of a boat which had capsized, when first lowered, and then righted. Through a fearful night of anxiety they had braved the storm. The rest was a blank, until Sir Frederick recovered his senses, after six weeks of fever and delirium, in a small village inn on the north coast of Spain. His companions had not escaped as well as himself. Of them he could hear no tidings. The brig which had picked him up, floating on the top of the water, and left him at that obscure place when proceeding on its voyage, had rescued no other survivor from the wreck. He could only conjecture what had been their fate, and suppose that, exhausted by their efforts, they had lost all power of managing the frail skiff, and had not been fortunate enough, like himself, to attract observation.

He had lost no time, after recovering his health,



in working his way back to England, as fast as the absolute poverty in which he was plunged would admit;—taking his share of the contrabandista's risks and hardships, and thankful for the gift of a sombrero. His spirits had returned when he found himself fairly on his road home; and, at Bourdeaux, he had easily obtained credit.

His adventures had been endless, but must be reserved for the winter evenings which they would yet spend together at Maydwell. At this moment, it was certainly Clarice's hand that received the tenderest pressure;—judging by the vivid blush which overspread her features.

His progress had been so rapid, after his funds were replenished, that he thought it useless to write. No letter could have preceded him. It was only at the neighbouring hotel that he had learned the strange course of events which caused those whom he so eagerly sought to be nearer to him at that moment than he could have fancied. He scarcely felt, when he first saw Clarice, after

his wanderings and exile, that he could regret any circumstance which placed them before him, even half an hour earlier than the time when he had calculated on finding them at Maydwell.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

ROGER and Rebecca Pemberton were, for the first time, entertaining company in the long dining hall, which the social habits of Sir Frederick Derwent had made the scene of such cordial hospitality. The foreigners, indeed, came and went without ceremony, making themselves more at home there than the master of the place altogether liked ; but, on this occasion, as Yermaloff was on the point of leaving England, they had been invited with greater formality. The massive silver plate, which Mrs. Derwent had left to her own relations, was now placed on the board, with what was an heir loom in the family. First and last, Roger had acquired all. He sat in the seat of the liberal-minded Derwents, the monarch of all he surveyed.

There seemed to be more solidity about his tenure of the property, that day, than had ever been the case before. Summer had come in its glory upon the earth. Through the open windows, the soft southern gale was breathing in, without any sign of Sir Frederick's return. The seasons were following each other slowly; and, as the new master of Maydwell saw the woods in leaf, and the long grass nearly ready for mowing, he looked forward with confidence to the time when the leaves must change and fall, the harvest yield its golden tribute. These, in their turn, would come and go:—in the winter, he should feel himself secure.

He had learned to pass the wine freely. His penurious habits were exchanged for boastful extravagance. The old butler was ordered to have everything arranged as it used to be in his former master's time. There were no discrepancies visible in the appointments of the table at which Rebecca and her spouse presided.

The days when they regaled themselves with

bacon and sour cyder, had long been over. The best wines in Sir Frederick's cellar,—a more ostentatious banquet than he would have set before his friends, — now covered the board. Roger and Rebecca ate and drank heartily. The lady's brocade dress might have stood on end with its own stiffness. Her stout arms were ornamented with bracelets, and she had also learned to cover the defects in their complexion with the best white kid gloves which the shop at Fordington could produce.

The person on her right hand was the boyish nobleman from Stanmore Park :—on the left sat Baron Yermaloff. The young lord was carving for her, and endeavouring to make himself agreeable. He was quite new to the county, having passed only a few weeks in the neighbourhood, the preceding year, before the approach of the cholera drove him from it. Most of his life had been spent on the continent, where he had learned to ape the vices of older men, and whence he had brought back the manners and principles of



the worst description of fashionable foreign society.

This was the first time that he had dined with the Pembertons. He thought them decidedly vulgar ; but they had shown hospitality to his guest, when Yermaloff was wounded in the duel ; and he did not know how to refuse their frequent invitations, without rudeness. At this moment, while he was complimenting Rebecca on her made dishes, he was resolving never to place himself under the necessity of partaking of them again.

The young Austrian officers, beneath the influence of the quickly circulating wines and liqueurs, were talking and laughing gaily. This was regarded as a kind of house-warming ; and, when the cloth was removed, Yermaloff stood up and drank the health of Roger and Rebecca, the master and mistress of the mansion, wishing them, in return for all the kindness they had shown him, health and strength to enjoy the favours of fortune.

Reynolds left the room precipitately. He could not stay and hear that toast drunk with all the honours. The old man closed his ears, while he remained in the hall, to deaden the sound of the felicitations that pierced through the thick oaken door.

Roger stood up to return thanks. He meant to propose, afterwards, the Baron's health, and to wish him a safe journey back to his own country. He was not a man of many words, and he hesitated as most persons who are not accustomed to public speaking, are apt to do. He looked up the table towards his wife. Rebecca was the bolder spirit, and sat undisturbed by the novel luxuries that surrounded her, bolt upright in her chair;—her gloved hands respectably folded, one under the other, across her broad chest;—the lights now burning in the silver candelabra shining on her face. Reflected in the polished mirror of the brightly rubbed mahogany,—Reynolds's peculiar pride,—was the costly family plate of the Derwents. Everything that riches

could procure,—all that could lend assurance and tangibility to his recently acquired station,—was there to give him courage.

Nevertheless, he said only a few words, and stopped. Such a startling sound rent the air, that a better speaker than Roger Pemberton might have been daunted. Pealing over dale and down, yet seemingly touched by invisible hands, close at his ear rang out from the neighbouring church-tower the long-silent bells of Maydwell. There was but a couple of hundred yards' distance between the sacred ivy-mantled building and the mansion; and that deafening clang, struck up by willing hands, filled loudly, but not discordantly, the old house with its heart-stirring music.

The blood, that seemed usually fixed in his coarse cheek, forsook it, as Roger Pemberton stood still and listened. Louder and louder the mad revelry of the joy-bells pealed over the valley, rose on the summer air, and sank with a dying fall on his ear. His pulses for an instant

stopped;—his face turned lividly white. If anybody could have doubted the fact announced by that glad note of welcome, Roger Pemberton's countenance was an index not to be mistaken. No one who looked at him could fail to interpret its meaning. He felt, at once and instinctively, that Sir Frederick was himself again;—that the people of Maydwell had got their own master to rule over them. There was hatred, fierce and virulent, as well as gladness, in the vehement pealing of the bells. The manly arms that pulled the ropes threw the pent-up emotions of the last sorrowful weeks into every nervous effort. It was said, long after, in the village, that the bells had never, before or since, rung such a peal, as when the news flew like wildfire through Maydwell street, that Sir Frederick had returned.

If Roger had had the heart to complete his carouse, it would not have been possible. There was not the slightest order in the establishment. The servants rushed wildly about, kissing each other, crying and laughing, and committing all

sorts of indecorums. Even Rebecca's self-confidence forsook her.

It was always a mystery how she and Roger evacuated the Hall. The party in the dining-room broke up in confusion. Some people said that the farmer and his dame got the old cart-horse and the gig to the door, and bustled off, by the back way, through the yard, while the domestics were unconscious of anything that was passing, in their joy at the new turn which matters had taken. Others again declared that Rebecca, with the brocade gown which she had pilfered from among the effects of the Derwents, kilted above her knee, was seen flying, with her craven-hearted spouse, through the long grass in the fields, by the shortest way back to Languard.

The fact was, that no one, at the time, had leisure to think about them. Not a soul in the house really cared what became of their mushroom lord and master. Roger Pemberton and Rebecca might have flown through the air on broomsticks,

without one member of the household raising his head to look after them.

Some of the guests pretended to believe, amidst their murmurs of apology at departing, that the deafening clangour raised by the bells was on account of a rustic wedding. The foreigners might not, all of them, be exactly aware what it betokened; but Roger knew, as well as if Sir Frederick stood before him, that his ancient enemy was come back to take his place in that house from him.

He did not attempt to keep up the farce, but sunk down in his seat, sick at heart, covering his face with his hands;—while still the peal went on, merrily enough to others, but rolling over his head like the rushing waters which seemed sounding in his ears. His brain reeled;—a dark film gathered over his eyes;—he could see nothing, hear nothing but the maddening clamour of the bells which were ringing him back into his original insignificance. Every note appeared to be

taking something of his manhood from him. When Rebecca urged him to go away from the place, the great overgrown baby cried like an obstinate child, and would not stir from his chair.

His cross-grained wife was touched with compassion. The foreigners had departed, with little notice from their host or hostess. She softened her loud voice, and made him lean upon her ; for his strength was gone. He shook like an old man of eighty, as Rebecca, with her vigorous arm, helped him along.

Down by the lawn, and across the brook, while the servants were flocking to the village, to hear the good news confirmed, and every door stood open, they shrank away ;—none knew nor heeded, why or whether. They had had no sympathisers with them in their short-lived prosperity ; and now, in their fall, they were alone. Back by the shortest track to Languard,—to the frowning old house, now darker and gloomier than ever,—the ungracious, mean-spirited pair departed. They

were gone before the strong arms that pulled the bells, as if they would bring the old tower about their ears, relaxed in their exertions. Roger Pemberton cursed with all his heart the short distance which separated him from the enemy's country. He would willingly have gone to the end of the earth, to miss hearing the bells ring from Maydwell tower all the evening, after the news arrived from Fordington that Sir Frederick was come back to enjoy his own again.

On the flag-staff hill and other commanding eminences, bonfires were lighted. The boys of the village and the young cricketers let off squibbs and rockets. Not a soul in the parish could think of going to bed. There was a regular Saturnalia ; and Sir Frederick was greatly scandalised by the excesses committed. They even went the length of dressing up bundles of rags, and burning Roger and Rebecca in effigy. Guy Faux was not more religiously consigned to the stake, than the detested couple, who, for a time, had sported their ill-gotten honours among them.



It was entirely unknown to Sir Frederick that this excitement ran its course. He had not left Fordington. In spite of various rumours that he was coming back immediately to his own home, he preferred remaining at the hotel, and allowing Roger and Rebecca leisure to decamp quietly.

The servants and villagers were disappointed in their expectation of seeing him arrive that evening. Dixon had time to pack up every item of Rebecca's goods and chattels, and send them to Languard, together with the locked trunks on which her name was written, but of which the contents were more dubiously her own. The night wore on, far from peaceably ; for the people were in a frantic state of exhilaration, and Roger and Rebecca could not look out of their windows without seeing the bonfires on the hill tops blazing.

Sir Frederick, meanwhile, was telling his adventures, over again, to the Bingleys, with Laura and Lewis on one side of him, and Clarice on the other. The master and mistress of the hotel

were made happy by his having bespoken a bed there ; and all the inhabitants of Fordington had gone to rest, in the pleasant anticipation of seeing him walk up the street, at least half a dozen times in the course of the following day.

## CHAPTER XIV.

SIR Frederick hardly needed, to enhance his enjoyment of rest after his late wanderings, the contrast afforded by his pleasant home embosomed among the green and swelling downs, the fields freshened by running waters and shady woods of Maydwell, with the arid plains and sierras of the Peninsula. A few days were sufficient for the servants, working with hearty good-will, to put the place in order for the reception of the family. The key of the garden-parlour must have been safe in the keeping of the Lady of the Well, since no difficulty was now found in producing it, as well as in removing every obstacle which had barred the progress and stopped the investigations and plundering propensities of Rebecca.

If she had carried off any spoil, or the foreigners,

as Reynolds declared, committed any damage, no enquiries were made, and no notice taken by Sir Frederick of these invasions of his rights and property. He was never, on any occasion, known to mention the time when the Pembertons inhabited Maydwell. His back was more determinedly turned upon the house on the hill summit than ever. If he could avoid it, as he had told Clarice and Laura on the first day of their arrival under his roof, he never looked in the direction of Languard.

There were many more agreeable subjects to occupy his thoughts. All who came near him sought as much as possible to obliterate from his recollection every painful and disagreeable impression. Laura and Clarice had resumed the process of petting him which was in force during his illness. Each word and look showed their delight at having him with them, and gave him very satisfactory evidence how dull and wretched had been the period of his absence.

They could not take half enough care of him ;

and it seemed necessary to have him constantly with them to prevent any risk of losing him again. He submitted very patiently to their somewhat unreasonable demands upon his time; and was never tired of walking, with a fair hand resting on each arm, through the cool and shady plantations. Their former habits were resumed, with only the difference of increased intimacy and affection. Clarice would have been quite hurt, if Sir Frederick had treated her differently from her friend. She felt that she did not deserve to be slighted, since she had in reality suffered most while he was away. Laura had hope to sustain her, as well as the society of her lover; but Clarice had nothing to support her spirits. Her natural light-heartedness had now returned, and she went about the house and gardens singing as merrily as the birds;—expected the same caress to be bestowed upon her which Laura received from her uncle; and would have been affronted, if, when she bade him good night, or met him in the breakfast-room, Sir

Frederick had kissed her less affectionately than his niece, or given up any of the pleasant habits which the breaking up of the barriers of reserve, at the moment of his return from exile, had naturally introduced.

All the country, with the widow at its head, flocked over to Maydwell to welcome Sir Frederick. His popularity was more unbounded than ever. Dixon, who passed her time in a constant alternation between laughing and crying, declared that it was a pleasure to get luncheon for a dozen parties, in succession of people who, when the Pembertons were at Maydwell Place, had never crossed its threshold. The old butler found it almost as difficult to stay in the room, and conduct himself with any sort of propriety, while Sir Frederick's health was drunk, as when the foreigners had wished Roger Pemberton long life and prosperity.

Lady Fortescue was in a great state of exhilaration, and committed more indiscretions in the way of pink feathers and streamers than ever, on

the day when the Maydwell cricket-ground was reopened to the players. She had renewed her lease of Carysfort for a twelvemonth. The seventh year of her term of occupation was nearly run out, but her hopes were strong, by a brilliant succession of fetes and pic-nics, race-balls and archeries, which she was vigorously planning, to bring the ensuing campaign to a successful close.

Her attention was much occupied with the idea of her former friend, Mrs. Le Sage, having become Madame Yermaloff; and she entertained many misgivings respecting that lady's being better qualified to manage her own affairs, now, than in the days when she had found her filling the water-jugs with her husband's famous sherry. The widow was very goodnatured, and seriously meditated undertaking a crusade, on behalf of her unfortunate fellow-sufferer in the hardships accompanying her Indian campaigns.

On this point, however, Clarice's mind had been considerably lightened by the receipt of a private letter from her mother, over which Mus-

tapha had not exercised any direct or indirect surveillance. It appeared, from this epistle that Madame Yermaloff had indulged in a good many flights of fancy, with regard to her husband's Slavonian fortress, founded upon the horror with which the place had always inspired her, from the period when she visited her husband's property, shortly after her second marriage. On the present occasion, as she candidly confessed, Madame Yermaloff had not been banished to Croatia at all.

She had sketched in the wolf, at the end of her letter, just as she was on the point of stepping into her carriage to go to a ball at the Russian Ambassador's, which, from the alarming tenor of Mustapha's threats, she firmly believed would be the last she was destined to enjoy at Naples, unless she could prevail upon Clarice to return and share the pleasures that gay city afforded. Beppo and Lara had both been ready for the journey, with little scarlet coats made to preserve them from the rigour of the



climate ; but happily, as yet, the darling animals had not been actually exposed to it.

The Baroness's style could scarcely be said to be improved by the removal of the restraint which Yermaloff had imposed upon her. This letter was more full of blanks and asterisks, fashionable gossip and inuendoes, than any which had preceded it. Mustapha was Mustapha. Laura had gone back into the nymph persecuted by Apollo. Sir Frederick was Il Burbero Benefico in his most *brusque* humour, since he had nearly reduced her to the necessity of wearing crape and sables for a twelvemonth. She hoped that Clarice would not think of giving her a son-in-law, almost as old as Blue Beard himself, and probably quite as disagreeable. *He* was on his way home, and would probably put a stop to the gaieties of which she gave as full and clear a description as was compatible with her inveterate habit of calling every person by some other name than his own ; or, as the nearest approach to it, using initials.

The absence of the animated series of hiero-

glyphics, which had enlivened the fictitious narrative of her sufferings in Croatia, detracted very much from the spirit and intelligibility of the present epistle. They had been inserted, she said, to prevent her daughter's feelings being too much harassed by the account she was forced to give of her declining health, in order to avoid the dreary banishment with which Yermaloff had menaced her, and which would certainly have been her destruction. She appeared to be as entirely free from ailment of any kind as late hours and dissipation permitted; and expressed a by no means overpowering anxiety for the return of her beautiful daughter to the scene of her own vain triumphs and extravagance.

Clarice had not shown her mother's letters to any one; but she told her friends at Maydwell that there had been some mistake in the information previously received through Baron Yermaloff, and that she had at present no occasion for uneasiness. She thanked Lady Fortescue warmly for the interest she had expressed in her parent, and

did not refuse the widow's invitation to visit her, when Laura's marriage should render it convenient for her to leave Maydwell Place.

Sir Frederick had testified his indignation at Roger Pemberton's iniquitous disposal of the presentation to the living, by bestowing it, immediately after his return, upon Lewis. No proof could be more convincing of disagreement between the brothers than the circumstance of the elder one having taken advantage of his short-lived usurpation to make such arrangements for providing another successor to Mr. Holcombe, as would, for the second time, disappoint Lewis of obtaining what had been his earliest wish. There needed nothing farther to reconcile Sir Frederick to a measure which facilitated the young clergyman's admission into his own family, than the knowledge that Roger had treated him worse than a stranger. The ungracious couple at Languard were so incensed at the turn events had taken, and especially at Lewis's good fortune,

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that they entered into negotiations to let the farm, and remove to a distant county.

Sir Frederick had offered no opposition to Laura's engagement, and had even done what lay in his power to forward her marriage with young Pemberton. Perhaps, however, the subject was distasteful to him ; for he did not, after Lady Fortescue, upon the present occasion, had made open allusion to it, and her invitation to Clarice had been half accepted, appear so cheerful as usual. This was the first time the widow had gone to her carriage, from that house, supported by any other arm than his own ; but he was deep in thought, and left Lewis Pemberton to do the honours. After his guests were gone, he strolled off into the woods alone.

It was a glorious evening, but he scarcely enjoyed the beauty of the sunset ; probably because he had no companion to whom he could point it out. Sir Frederick was, in fact, completely spoiled ; and he was, at that moment, wondering how it would be possible for him to exist at

Maydwell, with no one to take care of him, when Laura was married, and Clarice visiting among her friends.

He began to think that old Derwent had been behaving like a perfect simpleton. Until the widow gave, and Clarice hesitatingly accepted her invitation, within his hearing, it had not struck him that the present agreeable state of affairs must come to an end. He was in a bad humour, and everything assumed an unfavourable aspect. If he remained silent, nothing but misery was before him. It was still more unpleasant to anticipate the raillery which would escape from the smiling lips of the now happy and mirth-loving Clarice, if he betrayed his presumptuous wish to keep her with him, in the old house, for ever.

It was true that, since his return home, while treating him as affectionately as Laura did, and seeming to expect the same attentions, she would occasionally show a blushing consciousness which pleased him better than the warmest demonstra-

tions of regard ; but then young girls were such coquettes, that Sir Frederick, who had lately grown more diffident of his own recommendations to the favour of the fair sex, than in the days when he flirted alternately with the widow and Penelope, dared not attribute these symptoms of embarrassment to the cause to which he longed to trace them.

He had flattered himself that she sometimes watched for his approach and regretted his departure. Nay, even now, when he left the room, he fancied that she had expected him to ask her to walk with him ; but still, after all, she might be regarding him only as Laura's uncle. What possible inducement had he to offer,—since she could no longer be considered as an unfriended, portionless girl, who might see some counterbalancing advantages in his position,—to set against what he was disposed, in his humility, to esteem his own vast inferiority ?

Now that he knew her to be rich, as well as young and beautiful, his hopes of winning

her became fainter. He looked at the mansion, with the sunlight sparkling on the windows ;— the woods in full beauty, and the long grass bending as the summer wind passed over it ;—and wished that the woman he loved could see the place with his eyes, instead of casting upon its tranquil beauty the careless glance of one, who having passed a few pleasant months in a smiling scene like that, bids it an indifferent farewell, and goes forth with all the world before her, conquering and to conquer, to fulfil a higher destiny, and gladden another home.

A dark shadow seemed thrown over the woodland, as these thoughts crossed his mind. Sir Frederick turned from his survey of the house, and walked on, in a dispirited mood, along the path to the Lady's Well. Perhaps his old superstitious humour was upon him, and he wished to obtain some augury of the future from the aspect of the water, sleeping untroubled in the calmness of the evening ;—or he might remember and regret the moment when

tears had sprung to Clarice's eyes, upon hearing him allude to his own solitary, unloved existence; and prophetically picture Roger Pemberton, as he thought he might soon be, taking permanent possession of his home.

The little temple in the woods was, as we have said, a favourite walk. Many paths terminated at the brink of the well. It seemed as though some idea similar to his were in Clarice's mind; for she was sitting with her head resting on her hand, looking very sad and lonely, when Sir Frederick turned the sharp corner, shaded by the trees, which the path made, as it wound round to the front of the summer-house.

Above and around her,—dimpling the surface of the water at her feet, as he drew nigh, and lifting the spiral curls of her hair,—the evening wind was playing the same melodies which she had heard in fancy, in the cottage garden at Fordington. She scarcely looked happier now, than she had done before his approaching step and voice had startled her into forgetfulness of everything but pleasure at his safe return.



Was she thinking, while the birds sang amid the high trees, that the beauty of the summer had not brought with it the pleasant feeling of security which the reappearance of Sir Frederick had at first awakened? Now, when the place was putting on its fairest aspect, as if to welcome him;—when the mossy paths were soft beneath her feet, and the air blew blandly across her uncovered forehead,—was she, indeed, as her countenance expressed, sorry to leave it?

Sir Frederick was too nervous to form any decided opinion, as he stepped from beneath the shade of the trees, and entered the precincts of the shrine, determined to know his fate. The water in the well leaped up and sparkled, and caught the slanting sunbeams, as if the water-nymphs were doing their utmost to give him encouragement.

Meanwhile, after the pleasant custom of acknowledged lovers, Lewis Pemberton and Laura were walking together, and had mounted the hill which ascended from the margin of the brook steeply towards Languard. The farm was

in better hands than when Roger and Rebecca stinted the labourer of his pay, and grudged every drop of sour cyder to the haymakers. On the sloping fields, the grass was ready for the scythe; and, in the bright sunset-glow, the gable-ended house looked more cheerful than usual.

The homely people in possession invited them to enter. They had come to the place in time for the hay harvest, and before the sale of the furniture. Lewis was anxious to preserve some of the old cabinets and pictures, which Roger had ruthlessly decided should be brought to the hammer. If he could have prevented it, his brother would even have been debarred from becoming a purchaser, like any other stranger;—so virulent was his hatred.

Laura had not visited the spot since the time when she and Clarice had lost their way, and Lewis had compared her bending figure to the tall white lilies in the garden. They were in full blow now, filling the air with fragrance, and

shedding gleams of light along the shadowy border, under the high wall.

There was much for the lovers to talk over, in all that had happened since that period. The good-natured couple who had taken the farm did not disturb them; and, after inspecting the darkening rooms, and bestowing some regret on the dispersion of what had been in the family for centuries, Lewis made a note in his tablets about the articles he wished to purchase, and went his way, with his fair future bride leaning on his arm, to the terrace whence he had so often looked down upon Maydwell.

The house in the valley lay basking in the sunlight. The shadows of the trees and of the passing clouds were reflected in the motionless water of the fishponds; and the hanging woods swept down the hill-side, with the evening wind sighing among their branches.

As is usually the case when people are most intensely happy, a mournful sensation mingled with Laura's enjoyment.—“How much my uncle

will miss having us with him !” —she said, softly. “ The place is pleasant, nestling among the hills and trees ;—but it is very solitary. I cannot bear to think of his living there alone, now that he has become used to our society.”

Lewis smiled slightly, as he pressed her arm within his own. “ Do you think, Laura, that Sir Frederick intends to live alone?—I scarcely believe it.” He is too good and kind to lead an idle existence any longer ; and he will need a companion of a similar disposition to assist him in the improvements which he is bent upon making. It would not surprise me were the Hall to possess a mistress, nearly if not quite as soon as the Rectory.”

“ You are thinking of Clarice,” Laura said, blushing. “ I wish it were so ; but, I am afraid, she has never regarded my uncle otherwise than as a friend and protector. I thought differently, sometimes, when he was away ; but now, she is so gay and lighthearted ! How glad I should be, if she loved him, and would consent to be his

wife ! Her character has just the requisites in which his is most deficient ;—stability, perseverance and activity. I could fancy Maydwell a happy home, indeed, if she were its presiding genius.”

At that moment, plainly distinguishable from the white track of the broad gravel walk, which led from the woods and the bridge over the brook to the mansion, appeared two moving figures. As they passed from under the shade of the trees, and crossed the stream, they paused to look down upon the water ; then, with slow steps, as if anxious to prolong the time of being together ;—now seeming to watch the clouds in the summer heaven, the shadows on the downs, and the water-rail skimming over the lawn ;—in short, noticing evidently the fulness of happiness which pervaded the landscape, and perhaps, found an answering picture in their hearts,—Sir Frederick Derwent and Clarice, all unconscious of observation, went on, arm in arm, towards the house, and entered it by one of the drawing-room windows, just as

the last ray of the sun, which was sinking behind the trees, ceased to shine upon the building.

Laura and Lewis made no comment upon what they had seen; but they both felt perfectly satisfied that Sir Frederick was not destined to go back to the dreary days of his bachelor estate again. The slight tint of melancholy left Laura's sweet countenance, as she descended the hill, with her arm linked in that of Lewis,—listening to the sound of the church-bell, tolling the hour of curfew.

It was quite dark, and no moon was shining, when, some hours later, Sir Frederick Derwent came out of the private door into the garden, from his own apartments, as he had done, upon the first night of his niece's arrival, and walked round to the front of the house, looking up at the windows, as if to assure himself that there was every prospect of its inmates passing the night in security.

Now, as formerly, there was a light burning in Clarice's room, at which he looked long and

steadily, until a shadow passed between it and the curtain, and a hand which, even in the darkness, he seemed to recognise, undid the fastenings.

Alas, for the glorious days of liberty, gone never to return!—since a sweet musical voice chides him for being out so late, and bids him, for her sake, be careful. There is a spell in the words. They are very few and simple; but he does not seem disposed to murmur at not being able to come and go unquestioned. When the window is closed and the curtain drawn, he watches the light within for a few moments, and then obeys quietly the injunction laid upon him.

The night wind is blowing keenly for one who has lately been stretched on a bed of sickness; and, in the midst of his perils and adventures, Sir Frederick has learned that life has a higher value than he had ever dreamed it to possess, during his idle days of pleasure. As he walks through the grove, and re-enters the mansion, a thrill of satisfaction passes through his frame, for

he knows that he is beloved, and that his lot is not cast to dwell in the pleasant places of the earth, in heart-wearying solitude. He prays for strength to keep the good resolutions he has formed: and, in manly but solemn earnestness, lies down to rest, trusting that the time granted him shall be used to prevent the many blessings showered upon his path from rising up in judgment against him.

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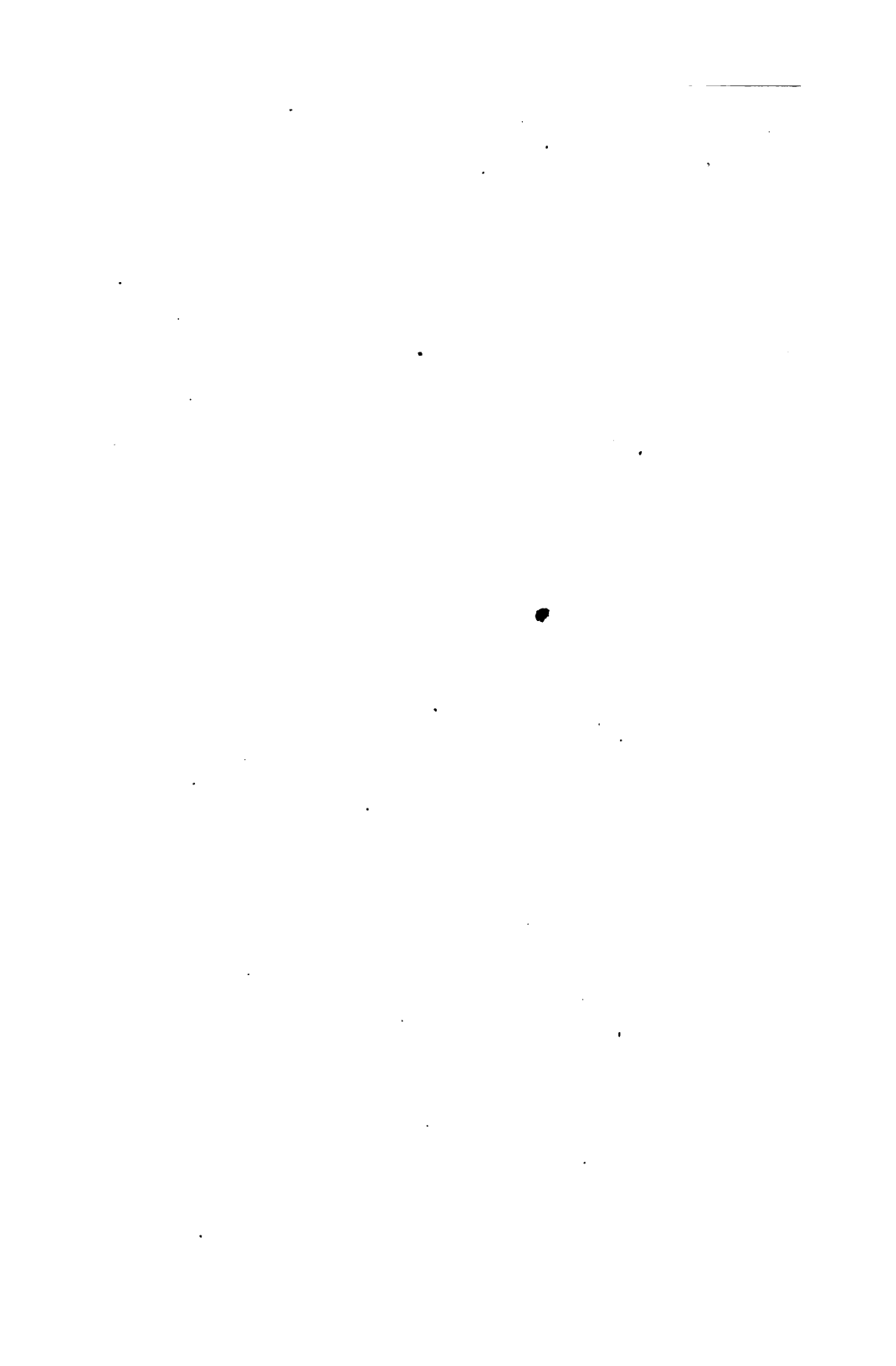
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